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# Inert Cities

## Globalization, Mobility and Suspension in Visual Culture

*Edited by Stephanie Hemelryk Donald and Christoph Lindner*

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# 1

## Inertia, Suspension and Mobility in the Global City

Stephanie Hemelryk Donald and Christoph Lindner

### Introduction

Inertia is a state of profound inaction. It describes a total lack of movement or willpower, a stillness that connotes death. This book deals, then, with a contradiction. It addresses visual practices relating to inertia in the global city. It does so in relation to a broad selection of urban settings and cultural contexts in Asia, Europe, North America and the Middle East. Cities discussed include Amsterdam, Berlin, Beirut, Lisbon, New York, Paris and Vienna. Chinese cities are in evidence too, as the sine qua non of the story of contemporary urban expansionism. This geographical spread is relevant for three reasons. First, it enables the book to address major cultural, economic and political centres which can be taken as representative of key developments in the rise and future of the global city. These include many subcategories of urban expansion: megacities of the global south, post-colonial hubs, cities of exclusion, exploding cities of Asia, world heritage cities and global financial capitals. Second, the range of cities enables the book to track artistic practices and urban conditions across diverse geographical and cultural contexts to see what is specific to individual cities and what ‘travels’ between cities and regions. Third, the emphasis on the city is also a focus on the people who inhabit them, those who, as Luis Buñuel would have it in his classic depiction of the emergent global city, *Los Olvidados* (1950), ‘live below the metropolis’. In short, we are trying to achieve a balance between urban

theory and philosophical enquiry, and between visual analysis and cultural politics.

### **Inertia and Suspension**

We have claimed that the central, organizing concern of this book is inertia, and yet we have to admit that the city is a mobile, urgent and active environment. Most people live in cities because they must, but also because they cannot imagine living anywhere else, and because that is where modern lives and cultures are increasingly shaped and pursued. The development of cities has been supported by the movements of peoples between countries, nations, continents and across time. They travel in search of resources, livelihoods and each other. The phenomenon of global cities is possible because of the human capacity to network across languages and cultures, to move physically or imaginatively, to make connections and to trade. Why then, would we write about inertia when it is so clear, and so forcibly demonstrated, that the city is always a lively place of movement and flow? Certainly, we could respond that there are some cases where liveliness is diminished, where the politics of the city veer away from trade and mutual energy and towards war and suspicion. The city becomes violent, bleak and repressive. Perhaps in these cases inertia is the response to pain. But we argue across this book that inertia is also the necessary corollary of mobility and energy in cities that are not suffering in such obvious ways.

We approach this topic by paying *attention* (in the full sense of the word) to the work of visual artists and filmmakers who incorporate stillness, suspension and indistinctness in their work, and we place these analyses in the context of social-political realities and aesthetic frameworks that render these practices legible as works acknowledging inertia as an ontological state that is integral, if in ways that are not always apparent, to everyday life.

When an idea is held in common by more than one scholar, living on different sides of the world and working in and through different cultural lenses, the pathways along which they have travelled to a meeting point – that moment of alert thought from which to begin the discussion – are bound to be different. So, we open the deliberations of this book by reconvening these pathways to and from our convergent idea of inertia, and trace its connection to the city, which is our mutual object of research. Given our common interest in visual forms of communication and expression, it is unsurprising that these pathways commence with images that we have encountered, in our

walks around the city, in the books on our office shelves and in the many other exhibitions and events into which we are drawn by the pathways of other thinkers, artists and filmmakers. However, it was co-location at the University of Amsterdam (Christoph Lindner as host and Stephanie Hemelryk Donald as visitor) that brought the idea to fruition. On the first day of Hemelryk's arrival, Amsterdam's Stadsschouwburg (City Theatre) presented a multimedia discussion of the new 'exploding' Chinese megacity (Figure 1.1). This was ironic for someone who had just flown in from the Asian region to spend time in a relatively small but historically saturated European city, specifically intending to think about how mobility and immobility manifest *European* cities and *European* structures of fear.

The presentation at the Stadsschouwburg was energetic and informed. It featured journalists, Chinese and European scholars, comedians, musicians and, inevitably, an architect. The emphasis was, as the title indicates, on accelerated change, ruthless progress, massive destruction and construction, environmental degradation and over-development, evidenced by cities or city quarters that are built for quick investment profit but remain unoccupied. The term 'ghost cities' hung suspended in the air next to the driving paradigm of megacities that had, after all, drawn in the rapt metropolitan and multilingual audience. An almost entirely Dutch audience was comfortable in English, and Chinese worked for many too. The concept of inertia was not mentioned – or not so far as we recall – but in retrospect, the evening's exuberant warning to Europe of its seeming galloping irrelevance in the face of China's rise suggested not only a local paralysis, but also carried undertones of China's points of inertia at the heart of its new megacities, and in the overspill into ghost cities that have never quite fulfilled their promise. The inertia that dared not speak its name is manifold in the Chinese condition. There are the displaced rural populations forcibly migrated from previous cultural environments, with no hope of returning to old homes that are now submerged by dam water, or covered in asphalt. There are the populations who live, like Buñuel's urban underclass in Mexico City, suspended in the interstices of hyper-modernity, both in the megacities and in the thousands of small urban explosions that are rendering the peasant villager both urban and displaced. Suspended too between the present and the past, whilst the future is crafted elsewhere by educated elites, these are the inert drivers of China's industrial expansion. They embody the paradox of hyper-modernity and explosive urbanization, their energies harnessed for the needs of the developmental state, but their own horizons necessarily diminished by the

INERT CITIES

# EXPLODING CHINA

## CHINA'S NEW MEGACITIES

13 sept. 2011



STADSSCHOUWBURGAMSTERDAM

[www.ssba.nl](http://www.ssba.nl)

KLM

Dutch

AMPEK

GO WEST PROJECT

SUN

1.1 *Exploding China* poster (adapted from the cover of *How the City Moved to Mr. Sun* by Michiel Hulshof and Daan Roggeveen). Courtesy of Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam, Michiel Hulshof and Daan Roggeveen.

limitations of their education, opportunities and the capacity of development to satisfy an entire population's ambitions simultaneously. The paradoxical nature of Chinese development is further evident in the re-evaluation of so-called 'ghost cities' two years after the *Exploding Cities* event. Whilst development speculation does lead to empty buildings and investment flight



in some areas, in others the ghost city is more accurately understood as a suburb in waiting – as buyers fit out their new homes and wait for other new residents to finish their own (dusty and disruptive) fit-outs before moving in (see Te-Ping, 2013).

Our first evening, back in 2011, taken up by China's combustible present, we left the theatre and re-entered the streets of Amsterdam, also a city in flux, but one much more obviously concerned with its links to a tangible, articulated and located past. As Lindner and Miriam Meissner indicate in their [essay](#) on 'decelerating Amsterdam' in this book, the contemporary city announces its planned shifts in spatio-temporal meaning through visual prompts to place memory for passers-by, especially on building sites where the shift from past to present to future becomes concrete. The interesting contrast is that, where Amsterdam privileges images of the urban past on its hoardings, Chinese developers foreground idealized visions of the new: 'new city new life' was Beijing's Olympic slogan and newness in this slogan has no room for memory work (see Pak Lei Chong, 2012). Walking in Amsterdam and thinking of the power of the visual mnemonic to locate the city in time brought us back not only to the subject of Europe, but to the particular fears which have been shaped, pulverized and concealed in the cities of Europe over the twentieth century.

The profound inertia caused by wartime destruction lies very close to the surface of most major European capitals and trading posts. It is also the prevailing source of inertia in cities still plagued by conflict. As Claire Launchbury explores in her analysis of contemporary Lebanese film, the disappearance of loved ones in war casts the population into a form of suspension, carrying on into a shaky peace without having mourned or known the full extent of their loss. Part of life is not lived, part of the city's emotional structure is not rebuilt. Meanwhile the reconstruction of [post-war](#) and [inter-war](#) cities into more adaptable, connected and networked hubs for economic development is both a continuation of the reconstruction of confidence and optimism underway since the early 1950s, and a form of denial. Urban transformation creates hope, but it also accommodates new pockets of inertia, for instance in south Beirut, in the outposts built for the working class but instead occupied by migrants in European cities and in the urban pockets of disadvantage and neglect in the United States, occupied by the people that Loïc Wacquant describes as 'urban outcasts' (2008). Yet there are ways in which the energy of youth might seize such

inertia and performatively transform it into a declaration of survival, just as, more tragically, there are other forms of youthful action that play into the hands of death.

The phenomenon of suspended animation is a biological process that allows some organisms to protract life through difficult times by effecting a transformation from life to seeming death. When the environment improves they transform once more and re-emerge. The concept has been mooted as a medical intervention for human trauma sufferers. It is, if you like, a kind of induced 'temporary' immortality. But it is an immortality that imitates death in order to regain life. As Shakespeare's Juliet discovers in the tomb, if the death is too nearly replicated, it may prove fatal. In two of the essays in this collection, by Bill Marshall and Shirley Jordan, there are discussions of the suspended animation of (mainly) young people living in global sprawl. This entails both a sociological observation of their opportunity and employment deficits, but also a description of young people's literal, physical and visceral response to their situation. They jump into the air, sometimes 'running' from building to building and sometimes leaping on the spot in extended exuberant movements. These feats of physical defiance occur on walls, on the roofs of buildings and in the interstices of the city's architecture. Their movements incorporate moments of impossible suspension above the city that lay claim to the immortality of youth. The blockages that social, economic, political and, indeed, architectural structures present to the youth of the global city are thus challenged and suspended in a breath of possibility and beauty. The cover image for this volume is taken from the Denis Darzacq series, *La Chute*, and was chosen for its resonance with the contradictions between indeterminacy and blockage, playfulness and control, intimacy and anonymity, inertia and mobility that it evokes. A young man has run up and leapt back, to hang suspended – a figure of visceral stillness contrasted against a bright blue municipal wall. On closer inspection one sees that the wall is not painted, but clad in minute blue mosaic tiles, once chosen to brighten up a city environment but now a register of decay. Some tiles are missing, others are chipped, the lower tiles are stained with dirt and the top is marked with water seepage. Within Darzacq's composition, the wall takes up most of the frame. The scale renders the lone jumper relatively small, but infinitely courageous. He is suspended as though he were answering a challenge to appropriate the wall's surface as a background to a work of art. If it had been painted rather than tiled, graffiti artists would have already taken this wall for their canvas. Instead, the performative body leaps against it, and then hangs

before it, to display the unstoppable presence and cultural value of mobile youth. The performance is a superb embodiment of the nexus of trauma, optimism, inertia and energy that the global city provokes.

The 2011 derivative phenomenon of ‘planking’, suspending oneself by lying still in ever more ridiculous or dangerous places, was a far less political intervention. It was more literally tensile but inert. To ‘plank’ is to hold a position of utter stillness, face down and with arms by one’s sides. It is a riff on an abdominal toning exercise made common through the widespread use of gyms and personal trainers in the more wealthy parts of the urban sphere. Done properly, it is exhausting, as it requires intense muscle control to hold the pose. Planking did not appear to have a social or class-based motivation behind it, but was rather a short-lived fad that spread across the viral architecture of the [Internet](#). ‘Planking’ was taught through YouTube rather than on the estates and exurban districts of Paris, London and New York. It was delinked from actual cities by its origins online, yet also served to connect cities in a network of perverse inaction and meaninglessness. The final dramatization of this inaction, by the death of a young man who could not hold the pose and toppled, reputedly because of the use of alcohol, ended its brief regime in the world of memes.

It was on a trip to the Institute of Contemporary Art in London in September 1989 that we first encountered a series of works that have profoundly shaped our understanding of the energy of youth, the inert charisma of the dead and the power of the trained artist’s eye to render that inertia perversely dynamic in shaping an encounter with contemporary urban existence. The previous year, Gerhard Richter had produced his sequence of paintings, *October 18, 1977* (1988), to record and remediate the deaths, in Stammheim Prison, of leaders of the Baader-Meinhof Red Army Faction. The title of the series refers to the date on which Gudrun Ensslin, Andreas Baader and Jan-Carl Raspe were found dead in their cells, but the series focuses also on Ulrike Meinhof, who had died in the same prison the previous May. The paintings are monochromatic, blurred and mostly refer to a single subject. The subject is always one of three leaders in the Red Army Faction (Ensslin, Meinhof, Baader) but there are also scenes (*Arrest*, *Cell* and *Funeral*) and a still life (*Record Player*).

Each painting renders a photograph from the public record – taken by the press or by the prison authorities, and often one which was published in the newspaper, *Der Stern* – into paint. The effect of remediation is similar to Richter’s later technique of painting over photographs: the subject is accorded

an interpretative distance and restored to a dignity that the photograph had betrayed through its original intrusion and subsequent publication. In *Hanged* (Ensslin hanged in her cell), the subject is remade as a spectre at her own demise. Her body is barely recognizable as such – a thin grey shape suspended in the corner of a room. Suspension is an effective metaphor for the whole event. It reminds us of her physical mode of death, of the doubt her supporters cast over its status as suicide or murder and of the suspension of memory through which the rebuilding of Germany's cities was funded through profits from companies deeply complicit in the National Socialist war machine 30 years earlier. However confused and misguided the approaches and aims of the BM/RAF, they were undoubtedly spawned in resistance to this complicity. The tragedy and failure of this resistance is the sorrow and the pity at the heart of the image, but it is not immediately available. Beyond the first move of remediation, the further the image is blurred by Richter's elliptical painting style, the more this distance attracts the eye of the spectator to look into the blur of modern death.

This counterintuitive move can be seen to epitomize the constant blurring of remediated urban experience, which requires a representational approach that can acknowledge the blurred inscrutability of human life, whilst seeking the core of emotionality and affect that makes it human. Seeking the truth of the hanging body in a prison in Stammheim is looking for meaning in a concrete jungle. It is always already too late. Nothing that happens in *October 18, 1977* can be separated from the immanence of the urban response to ~~post-war~~ reconstruction, to the idea of the crowds waiting outside and featured in *Funeral*; or from the print media that reproduces the deaths and distributes them across German cities. It is precisely this insistence that apparent boundaries between institutional, private and public spaces must not create barriers to political meaning that informs those who document youth culture in cities around the world. This relation between death, decay and ethical sociality is debated in Hemelryk Donald's essay in this volume on images of death in contemporary film (Chapter 8). The point has similarly been made in regards to the disappearance at the heart of regeneration in Ackbar Abbas' account of modernity and architecture in Hong Kong (1997), where what is most meaningful is that which has disappeared in the amnesiac construction of new meaning.

In *The Hours* (2002), a film that draws heavily on the photographer and filmmaker Robert Frank's understated but uncanny aesthetic in the New York sequences, the key character Robert (Ed Harris), suffering from

advanced AIDS, pulls aside the shutters of a darkened apartment and sits astride his window to say farewell to his oldest friend, before tumbling over the edge. The horror of his fall is the common horror of disappearance in and into the city. But that horror also resides in the realization on the part of his old friend (Meryl Streep) that his inertia before dying was greater and more profoundly lonely than the act of dying on the sidewalk several stories below. As he died he became newly visible as a person. Whilst he was the living dead, he was a statistic of infection. His shuttered apartment is reminiscent of the European plague, where those already sick lay dying in houses with a white cross painted on the door.

The city emerges through the interaction between the artist's eye and the surfaces on which the urban population inscribes its passing, fractious existence. Likewise, the people of the city are made visible through the framing afforded by a collusion of artistic practice and urban traces of presence and absence. In *October 18, 1977*, the city is minimally present in the portraits, but forcefully so in the contextual scenes. In *Arrest*, brutalist 1960s buildings loom over the car park where Baader and Raspe were ambushed and detained after a gunfight. In *Funeral*, the crowd of thousands of mourners, supporters and spectators irrupt into the portraits of the three protagonists of the series, if such a word is permissible in such a context. The women are pictured alive and dead, Meinhof as a younger woman at the point of radicalization and Ensslin on her way to an identity parade in Essen Prison in 1972. These 'live' images portray the women looking directly at us. The defiance of their looking emphasizes the youth of the subjects, so that the subsequent portraits of the dead are shocking, moving and perversely resistant to their own passing. Regarding the paintings, whether standing in the gallery in 1989 or flicking through the pages of the later book, the death of the young is ineluctably sad. Richter has rendered these late twentieth-century bogeymen – who were heroic to some, terrorists and murderers to others and misguided to the artist himself – as no more nor less than people who have died in prison, and who were once very young.

In the triptych *Tote (Dead)* there are three renditions of Ulrike Meinhof's head and upper torso, laid on the ground after retrieval from her cell, where she was found hanging on 9 May 1972. The presentation is of a head-and-shoulders portrait in profile, but turned on its side, a 90-degree inversion indicating death. Her eyes are closed and a rope burn is clearly visible around her neck. In the first painting (62cm × 67cm) her face is centred, a little to the right. Her cheeks and nose, while not prominent, are firmly sketched.

She seems roughened and heavy. In the second remediation (62cm × 62cm), her face and head have shrunk, the scale of the woman within the frame has been reduced and the light from her white cheeks is brighter against the greater expanse of blackness around her in the now squared image. The third image is smaller still (35cm × 40cm). The head now takes up more of the picture's surface but the definition of the paintwork defers to the blurring of the *October 18, 1977* series as a whole.

The effect of the reductions is to accentuate the dynamics of change that attaches to the inert corpse. The body reduces and its sphere lessens as decay sets in, and forgetfulness removes the person from the human sphere. At the same time, the reduction imposes a childish vulnerability on the image, a suspension between ethereality and disappearance that provokes our attention. The paradox of looking at the blurred and reducing head of the dead woman reiterates the counter-movements between inertia and transformation, suspension and attentiveness, which organize lived experience.

The discussion so far has suggested that the inertia associated with youth, resistance and death is often at the heart of visual depictions of modern urban experience. Suspension has figured as a physicalized expression of alienation and resistance in urban settings. We have also mentioned the traumatic suspension of emotional clarity caused by the disappearances and destructive patterns of war and violence, particularly the loss of homes and loved ones. And, of course, the suspension of the body was the method of suicide used by the two female members of the Baader Meinhof group in Stammheim Prison.

Whether in the destructions of old environments to create new explosions of urban development, in which new forms of inertia are immediately embedded, or in images of death or ruination that linger in the blurred backgrounds of the urban imaginary of old cities, the inert city rests beneath and within the anxious mobility of its surface tensions. In painting, photography and film, processes of inscription and of blurring deliver absence and non-place so that the fragility of people and place may be acknowledged. This refers us to the anthropologist Marc Augé's concept of non-place (1995) and to the urban underclasses who suffer the inertia of the worst of such places. The city is suspended between one state and another, between one rush of energy and the next, between a new life and a new death. Indeed, Augé's more recent, ficto-ethnographic work, *No Fixed Abode*, explores the predicament of the '*sans domiciles stable*' (people with no fixed abode, the transient or homeless) as an experience of suspension between the possibility of living with others and radical disconnection from the world of other

people. The protagonist is a retired tax inspector whose pension cannot cover his daily expenses, which include alimony payments to two ex-spouses. He imagines that freeing himself of the financial burden of running an apartment might permit him a different form of survival, and thus he takes to sleeping in his car, moving it around his *quartier* to avoid parking fines. As the filmmaker Agnès Varda showed in her exemplary exposition of vagrancy *Sans Toit Ni Loi* (1985), mobility without means of support, however, is more likely to end in an accelerated death spiral than in freedom. For Augé's tax inspector, as with the female tramp Mona in Varda's film, the loss of spatial and temporal certainty creates ontological crises that prove fatal.

The point of these works is to acknowledge the ordinary likelihood of such extraordinarily dangerous suspensions inside human society. Both characters appear to function as survivors, the tax inspector even taking a new lover, until suddenly they are gone. Such vacillations between stasis and movement, stoppage and flow, being and non-being are among the core concerns of Hugh Campbell's essay on urban portrait photography (Chapter 3), as well as informing Lúcia Nagib's essay on cinematic Lisbon (Chapter 10). For Campbell, who analyses pedestrian headshots in New York's Times Square and the squashed faces of commuters in Tokyo's subway, suspension through the stilling effects of photography becomes a form of aesthetic intervention designed to produce new, heightened awareness of the discomforts, but also the intimacies, of everyday urban life. His subjects are safely ensconced in urban flows of well-being, but they too are in suspension, they too are immensely vulnerable to the city's capacity to isolate and suspend its protagonists. In Nagib's discussion, the inertia of the city is analysed through concepts which she terms 'reflexive stasis' and 'scale reversal'. The perverse relationality of temporality and space, of objects in space and indeed of the very media of representation, including the toy theatre in Raúl Ruiz's 2010 masterwork *Mysteries of Lisbon*, becomes a grammar of revelation. Her analyses are framed in relation to a prehistory of slow cinema and reference Portugal's urban decay in the context of the deceleration of the European project of global influence, tracing a series of tensions between modern and ~~postmodern~~, past and present, fixity and flow.

Suspension might also be quite prosaic, if fundamental, to urban experience. David Bissell argues in this volume that much of the modern commute is about 'attritive stillness', a phrase that recalls the repetitive suspension of time whilst sitting in endless traffic jams to and from work (Chapter 5). By contrast, Andrew Webber's essay on the spectrality of urban living in recent



films set in Berlin shows how the city produces ‘traumatic arrest’, strangely indeterminate, ghostly forms of stillness and stagnation (Chapter 11). Meanwhile Heide Kunzelmann and Elisabeth Mayerhofer’s *essay* on Vienna (Chapter 7) presents a city that is strategically retrospective, playing with nostalgic, politically evacuated images of its nineteenth-century heyday. Together, these explorations of suspension point towards the durational, spectral and sentimental articulations of the inert city.

## Conclusion

This collection thus considers inertia, and related forms of suspension, stillness and blockage, as a condition in urban life articulated and operationalized through visual culture and spatial practice. In identifying such counter-shifts to the city of speed and flow, whether gradual or extreme, we question the degree to which mobility as such is aspirational, imaginary, absolute, or transient. In paying attention to pace and momentum, we reflect on generative processes in an increasingly denaturalized urban world. Without the constant action of human creativity and imagination, the city is without meaning or form. Yet the city requires stillness and decay to contemplate and enact regeneration.

How then should we recognize and assess the value of inertia and stillness (which we see as theoretically and actually discrete) in a city, and in regards to the forward march of globalization? When does inertia presage decay and when does it promise immanence and rebirth? From Mike Davis’s *Dead Cities*, his bitter eulogy for the American metropolis, we learn that the death of the city is marked by a slide into decay and that this is terminal. But perhaps the prognosis is not so straightforward, as suggested by Arjun Appadurai’s more optimistic outlook on the ‘deep democracy’ of cities in *The Future as Cultural Fact* (2013), or Edward Soja’s upbeat reassessment of the potential for greater urban equality in *Seeking Spatial Justice* (2010). Whose cities are we actually discussing in these ruminations of disaster and recovery? Is the necrosis of urban humanity an absolute demise or more specifically a class-based, ethnic, generational, spatial, or aesthetic one?

We are all familiar with the often-repeated refrain that now is the first time in human history that more than half the world’s population lives in cities. It has also become commonplace to identify globalization as playing a pivotal role in bringing about this shift to a ‘new urban age’. Among other



developments, globalization has spurred the accelerated growth of cities, the mass migration of rural inhabitants to urban centres and the widening gap between the urban rich and the urban poor. Much less discussed is that associated demographic revolutions mean that whilst some regions are bursting with youth, others are ageing rapidly, and still others are losing momentum in the face of new competition and reinvented images of modernity. Both development and decay are constitutive of the worlds of culture and aesthetic attention that we build and inhabit. These spaces are fundamental to the experience of globalization at the level of the street, and when they produce slowness, stillness, or indeed inertia, larger conceptualizations of the city must shift accordingly.

The book's focus is thus on the poetics and politics of the inert city, as evinced through visual narrative and aesthetics. Here, the contours of stillness and slow motion are interpreted as correctives to the dominance of the image of a fast-paced global city that remains immune to its own critique. The premise of the work draws productively on migration specialists and political geographers such as Tim Cresswell (2006) and Eleonore Kofman (2002), whose work insists on the variability and localization of transurban movement. Similarly it allows us to engage with screen and photographic theorists in debating the role of globalization in the reinvention of space, and with philosophers and cultural theorists, whose insights into the subjective, ontological and epistemological dimensions of urban experience are highly relevant.

Reflecting these concerns, the book is organized into three interlocking sections. The essays in Part 1 (Stillness) focus on the aesthetic, performative and spatial strategies used to create and uncover moments of stasis and standstill in globalized urban spaces, ranging from London and Paris to New York and Tokyo. The essays in Part 2 (Deceleration) focus on visual practices in urban design, architecture and city image (and counter-image) making that deliberately posit/articulate slowness, backwardness, nostalgia and stoppage as counterpoints to the paradigm of progress and acceleration that typically marks global urban development. The essays in Part 3 (Slow Motion) explore how images of mobility and modernization, commonly associated with twenty-first century global cities, can become inverted or redirected in the context of post-colonial urbanism, transnational migration and the aesthetics of film. The moving image of cinema would seem to pose an innate challenge to the possibility of representing inertia. Nonetheless,

cinema has found ways of imagining the contradictions between globalization as a force for movement outwards, and globalization as vortex of stoppage, stagnation and death.

In addressing these issues, the following essays combine to pose a theoretical challenge to the hermeneutic view of globalization, regarding its assumed proairetic contribution to the narrative of modernity. Rather the essays discover the abortive function of globalization on progressive politics at the level of the image, the city and the subject. Crucially, the book as a whole acknowledges the work of macro theories of globalization and urban life, but seeks to re-scale our collective attention to urban events, aesthetic codes and social phenomena that sit both within and beyond narratives of global networks and connectivity.

# Part 1

## Stillness



# 2

## On Hold: Urban Photography as Interruption<sup>1</sup>

Shirley Jordan

In his monograph *On the Move*, which explores the evolution of mobility as a positive value in the modern Western world, Tim Cresswell observes: '[i]n contemporary social thought, words associated with mobility are unremittingly positive. If something can be said to be fluid, dynamic, in flux, or simply mobile, then it is seen to be progressive, exciting and contemporary' (Cresswell, 2006: 25). This chapter considers how practices in contemporary visual culture have recently been challenging or cutting across the dominant theoretical and philosophical obsession with mobility. Its focus is on a medium and a category which enjoy a privileged relationship with new critical thinking on the still and the slow: urban photography. More specifically it concerns recent images made by three major experimental practitioners: French photographers Denis Darzacq and Valérie Jouve, and Chinese performance artist and photographer Li Wei. Darzacq, originally a news reporter for national French dailies *Le Monde* and *Libération*, has focused over the last decade or so on producing work at the interface between documentary and art photography and which investigates the lives of disadvantaged and marginalized young people in outer-city areas. Jouve has been predominantly associated over the last two decades with charting various forms of human presence in and around the city. Wei, currently one of the most influential artists in China, is known for the surreal and theatrical images of human bodies which he catches suspended in mid-air above contemporary Chinese cityscapes. All three are concerned with bodies enmeshed in and

(partially) defined by urban and peri-urban space as well as with the potential of such bodies to rewrite these spaces. All three work in series to insist on and explore various categories of movement by interrupting them, although in quite different ways. All carefully elaborate, and then repeat, a given device. What I pursue in this chapter are the various ways in which these three photographers do more than just still the urban flow through lens-based art. I argue that the practices of Jouve, Darzacq and Li Wei are especially attentive to a particular kind of stilling which we might refer to as interruption, and further that their work relates to broader processes of rethinking interruption as a function of the photographic image. We need to consider the terms of this rethinking before turning to analyse the images themselves.

While photography by its very nature freezes motion, attaining meaning through its play on the dialectic between movement and stillness and through interfering with space and time, I want to argue that in these particular works such stilling is especially foregrounded, especially disruptive, becoming at once newly self-conscious and newly critical. I also want to tease out the differences between ‘freezing’ the world and interrupting it; to argue that the two are not the same. In his study of photography entitled *The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography and the Everyday*, John Roberts explores a kind of photographic representation which is concerned with documentary images and which we might call critical realism. He argues for the photograph as ‘a form of *practical* knowledge, an inscription of, and an intervention in, a socially divided world’ (Roberts, 1998: 4). While such a function remains one possible strand of photography, there is an extended spectrum of interruptions available to practitioners, some of which have evolved along with new image-making technologies. What Roberts called the ‘art of interruption’ might, then, no longer involve freezing a naturally occurring process in its tracks in order to reveal the everyday manifestations of political structures. It might instead, at an opposite extreme, involve the digital creation of a metaphorical parallel world. Indeed, in his more recent writings on photography Roberts turns to explore the ramifications of post-documentary practice and of photography after the photograph (Roberts, 2009).

In this chapter I use ‘interruption’ to refer to how photography combines ideas of the documentary and the invented image in order to sidestep the everyday flow of events; to put them on hold. I highlight the particularities of several experiments produced by Darzacq, Jouve and Wei and show what makes interruption as practised by these distinctive practitioners a critical practice that is especially adequate to the contemporary moment. My

argument is fed by Roberts's shifting view of photography as well as by a range of thinking on urban mobility and by a core idea that interruption in Darzacq, Jouve and Wei involves a kind of extraction: all are concerned not just with stilling, but with pointedly extracting individuals from the mass of bodies in urban space. How is such extraction obtained and what effects does it produce? My chapter will also pursue throughout its exploration of all three photographers Jouve's articulation of the question that underpins her entire practice: 'how can photography go against the grain of the established order through its optical register alone?' (Inkster, 2002: 5),<sup>2</sup> a question expressing a will that photography *as a medium* should be subversive of the way things are.

Of particular use in addressing Jouve's question will be recent theory on the status of much contemporary photography as staged or performed image, as analysed by Michel Poivert in his recently updated survey of the field (Poivert, 2010: 209–35). Poivert observes that this element of staging is the single feature which most distinguishes photography of the 2000s from its predecessors. Such photography involves the scrupulous planning and execution of an action for the camera. It is frank about its own artifice, foregrounding it rather than concealing it and thus critiquing residual assumptions of photography's naturalism. It distances us from the material world, setting us at one – or several – steps removed by asking us to be attentive to issues of image construction. Thus it proclaims its autonomy rather than asking us to consider it through its proximity to the world. Staged photography such as this seems, then, to refer us less back to the 'real' world than to performances relating to that world in painting or film stills (Poivert, 2010: 209).

Many of the staged images considered in Poivert's study are highly theatrical, involving complicated *mises-en-scène*, rich in props and with complex narrative implications. He refers predominantly to interior scenes such as those of Larry Sultan, or to performances set in dreamlike landscapes, often evoking a painterly aesthetic and tapping intricately into the realms of the subconscious and/or the surreal. Practitioners studied by Poivert in this regard include, for example, Erwin Olaf, Tom Hunter, Sarah Dobai, Jeff Bark, Gregory Crewdson, Désirée Dolron, Regina Virserius, Anoeck Steketé and Elina Brotherus. In their work the staged image becomes oddly self-sufficient: it is parallel to, rather than a part of, the reality on which we suppose it comments: '[e]verything is *in* the image, without any apparent necessity to signify anything outside it' (Poivert, 2010: 210). Here I consider a different kind of performed image: one which is resolutely urban and which therefore



2.1 Denis Darzacq, *La Chute/The Fall* (2007). Courtesy of the artist.

retains, even as it departs from it, a connection with the documentary mode through which the urban has habitually been photographed. Documentary realism in these photographs is held in tension with, if ultimately superseded by, the compelling presence of a more autonomous visual field. It is not that the photograph becomes divorced from reality and purely self-contained or self-referential, but that the nature of its relationship to reality is interrupted and shifts. Poivert states that theatrical photographic practice might introduce hesitation or merging between the staged and the documentary, fiction and reality. The performativity of images by Darzacq, Jouve and Wei puts in operation, then, new kinds of photographic interruption which dislodge those theorized by Roberts in 1998 and which produce critique in different ways.

Before pursuing my argument any further, it will be useful for us to take a preliminary look at some of the images concerned. Importantly, each of the photographers I study here works in series. The first to be analysed are Darzacq's beautiful and shocking suspensions in *La Chute* (henceforth *The Fall*) (2007) (Figure 2.1) and in *Hyper* (2009) (Figure 2.2). These two series





2.2 Denis Darzacq, *Hyper* (2009). Courtesy of the artist.

involved young hip-hop or capoeira dancers performing jumps and leaps in the faceless peripheral areas of Paris or in hypermarkets in Paris and Rouen. Some contextual information is needed here: the images of *The Fall*, for which their author won a World Press Photo Award in 2008, are responses to the disorientation of young people in France's troubled, multiracial suburban estates: those youngsters who former president Nicolas Sarkozy threatened,

after a series of violent riots in Paris's suburbs in 2005, to 'clean out with a pressure hose'. Embedded in these images of isolated youngsters in free fall is a complex narrative about the uneasy relationship between the historic centre as global city of culture, heritage and finance and the world beyond its perimeter road or '*périphérique*'. The *Hyper* project continues to work with the same kind of interruptive phenomenon. Here blank architecture is replaced by the alienating interior of hypermarkets. Young men and women are eerily suspended, hanging limply beside refrigerated cabinets or walking on air in the wrapping paper aisle. They are halted at implausible angles, apparently weightless and hovering, or violently catapulted by some immense invisible force.

Jouve's images constitute a quieter and differently dramatic take on the urban ordinary. Her observations are also clustered into generic categories including, for example, *Les Situations* (henceforth *Situations*); *Les Personnages* (henceforth *Characters*); *Les Passants* (henceforth *Passers-By*). Like Darzacq, she makes images of individuals which attain collective meaning through the series, thus heightening the intensity of the observation being made. Jouve's recent project *En attente* (*On Hold*), a series of photographs made in 2008 and 2009 in the Palestinian Autonomous Territories, also takes its title from the idea of interrupted processes. It is more directly political and more about waiting than disrupting and interrupting, although there is clearly a continuity with the photographer's previous work in terms of contemplating, or creating, suspension. Jouve explicitly sees her work as accompanying her era, especially in terms of contemporary experiences of the city, which she describes as 'a machine but also a chemistry, a reality which is impossible to embrace, to hold, an irrational sensation ... an extraordinary matter, almost a madness' (Inkster, 2002: 5). The interruptions of this 'almost madness' include, for example, photographs made with the collaboration of named individuals who adopt unusual, expressive attitudes which open up a range of potential meanings about the city. The photographs that I will be looking at for the purposes of this chapter are the interlinked series *Les Fumeurs* (henceforth *Smokers*) of 1998 (Figures 2.3 and 2.4) and *Les Sorties de Bureaux* (henceforth *Office Exits*) of 1998–2001 (Figures 2.5–2.7). In the first, office workers taking a break outside their building draw on cigarettes. The second features more workers in the flow of homeward-bound commuters. Both series were made in New York, although arguably the particular urban context scarcely matters.

The performative photographs made by Li Wei over the last decade or so return us to Darzacq's metaphorically suspended bodies, but do so to



2.3 Valérie Jouve, *Les Fumeurs/Smokers* (1998). Courtesy of Galerie Xippas.

more overtly dramatic effect. These compositions – generally made in Beijing where Wei lives and works – are produced through carefully elaborated stunts. Several of them are grouped into series, with individual images numbered and grouped under overarching titles such as *Life on High*; *Beyond Gravity*; *A Pause for Humanity* (Figure 2.8) or *Levels of Freedom*, an ironically titled series capturing the moment when the photographer appears falling from various storeys of high-rise buildings. Their theatricality is hard-won: they require devices combining mirrors, steel cables and cranes (supports which are digitally removed in post-production) as well as courage on the



2.4 Valérie Jouve, *Les Fumeurs/Smokers* (1998). Courtesy of Galerie Xippas.

part of the photographer who is, routinely, his own subject. Wei orchestrates images in which he features, alone or clustered with others, in implausible positions: clinging to the top of a motorway lamp-post (*Bright Apex*, 2007); leaping into the air, pursued by missiles (*Bullet 4*, 2010); reaching for the outstretched arms of women who try to save him as he apparently plummets past them down the side of a tower block and towards the heaving network of roads and construction sites in the Beijing megalopolis below (*29 Levels of Freedom*, 2003). These photographs of astonishing aerial performances destabilize the viewer. They are intended as comments on the disorientating



2.5 Valérie Jouve, *Les Sorties de bureaux/Office Exits* (1998–2001). Courtesy of Galerie Xippas.

complexity entailed in inhabiting the accelerated space-time of the post-global era as well as sceptical observations on Chinese society and responses to the need to free the mind and body from its often crippling constraints.

The images made by all three photographers might be illuminated in several productive ways by theories of mobility. Cresswell's broad-brush study of mobility, which I have already referenced, sets a sedentary metaphysics and a nomadic metaphysics against each other, the latter having taken precedence in recent years but each in fact relying dialectically on the other for its powerful pull. What I will suggest is that there is a supersessive moment, achieved through photographic interruption, wherein *both* metaphysics are taken to task in order to better account for a particular sense of being in the world which is more critical of the contemporary moment. The distinctive





2.6 Valérie Jouve, *Les Sorties de bureaux/Office Exits* (1998–2001). Courtesy of Galerie Xippas.

suspensions and extractions that we see in operation in Darzacq, Jouve and Wei undercut many of the predicates of our mobility-obsessed culture, interrupting our easy assumptions about, for instance, the unremittingly positive paradigm of nomadism which, while useful to think with, is not always so plausible in practice (one needs the *means* to invest mobility with value). I read these photographs, then, as ways of unsettling the consensus that being on the move is unquestionably positive. This unsettling is effected, in part, by calling us back to the imperative of the individual body.

A final point about photographic technology is needed before we turn to a detailed analysis of the images themselves. It is important to establish



2.7 Valérie Jouve, *Les Sorties de bureaux/Office Exits* (1998–2001). Courtesy of Galerie Xippas.



2.8 Li Wei, *A Pause for Humanity 1* (2005). Courtesy of the artist.

that all the photographers referenced here are self-consciously working at the contemporary fault line between the indexical as a ‘privileged structure of visual meaning’ (Inkster, 2002: 87) and digital manipulation. Often, as we shall see, they do so in quite surprising ways. All insist that we *read* the medium, and create the conditions to bring it to legibility. As Dean Inkster rightly remarks with regard to Jouve, this happens only when ‘we arrest [the photograph’s] immediacy, when we ruin the norm of visibility as immediate and non-conceptual contact’ (Inkster, 2002: 89). All three photographers call us to look beyond clichés of ‘naturalness’ and transparency and ask that we attend instead to the ‘constructedness’ and the thickened sense of time and meaning of the photographic image as a newly constituted material world in itself. I will argue that as they put movement and flow on hold, the images of interruption that we now move on to consider compress multiple meanings *about* movement and flow. Thus Darzacq, Jouve and Wei may be considered to belong to that category of contemporary photographers who



2.7 (continued)

are defined by Poivert as ‘*metteurs en scène* of immobility’ (Poivert, 2010: 221).

### Denis Darzacq: Hovering, Stuttering

What are the meanings released by reading Darzacq’s powerfully insistent images of suspended bodies through the critical lens of interruption? As I have suggested, *The Fall* and *Hyper* develop a shared idiom of acceleration-and-arrest to make available tensions related to the entrapment of young people, somewhere between energy and disorientation, in a society in which they are ignored, feared and left to crash. The series point to what threatens to be an entire generation in free fall, its energy untapped, and we might argue that their implications reach way beyond the French scene which was their origin. The flung bodies are set against anonymous, transferable modern architecture or the globally transferable environment of the hypermarket interior to give the sense that this could be taking place any place. Such transferability of meaning in the interruption seems remarkably prescient given the ever-increasing numbers of young people now situated outside economic mobility.

I want to argue that the impact of Darzacq’s images is obtained by a layering of interruptions: first, the unusual gestures and shapes made by these leaps and twists are interruptions in as much as they are movement radically out-of-context; second, Darzacq asked his young subjects to interrupt their athletic feats, to relax all their muscles at once and to become, in fact, inert in mid-air. In turn, the camera interrupts these interruptions, seizing the body as it dissociates, or extracts itself. In this way, issues of control and volition become very live: the bodies are not just visible as dancing and athletic; they are *also* available to us, through that layered moment of interruption, as falling, endangered, blasted and vulnerable. These are bodies which hover in enforced and violent expulsion: bodies which *have* no place; which do not *know* their place, and whose energetically creative movements, the purpose of which is unclear, interrupt the legibility of familiar spaces and activities.

Darzacq gathers all the disparate idiosyncrasy of these bodies to ask us to focus on the questions of energy (*Hyper*) and descent (*The Fall*) which level them. Let us just work with those titles for a moment. Both reference mobility: the latter with tragic overtones and alluding perhaps to a biblical paradigm of falling; the former adopting just a prefix. The title *The Fall* directs us through the temporal ambiguity of the fall: it asks us to read the accident, as we might say following Paul Virilio’s thinking on city space, on art and



fear and the technology of the image. It asks us to focus not on the creative leap that has produced these amazing suspensions but on what comes next; to see the future collision concealed in the landscape of events (Virilio, 2007). We can, of course, read these falling bodies in dialogue with the globally resonant images of the falling bodies of 9/11, interruptions of city mobility of such magnitude that they are imprinted on everyone's retinal consciousness: Darzacq's little, local interruptions signify, at least in part, as visual echoes of the larger interruption. These too are exceptional and shocking images of limp bodies in the air as we have not seen them before; these too seem inconceivable, theatrical and yet are real; these too induce a sense of disbelief. As Angelique Chrisafis suggests with reference to Darzacq's project: 'René Magritte would have declared: "This is not a dancer. This is a young French person falling from the sky"' (Chrisafis, 2007). The difference between them and the 9/11 bodies is that nobody may notice when they hit the pavement.

In *Hyper* the bodies in mid-air also reference the 9/11 fall in as much as they signify the interruption of economic activity. Set adrift from its linguistic moorings, the prefix 'hyper' alludes at once to the excesses of market society on the move; to the hyperactivity of the world of global progress; and to the explosive energy of these young bodies whose uncanny presence disrupts the banal spaces of consumerism. Disturbing the spatial order of the hypermarket's unyielding grid, they remain entirely extracted from its classification systems and from the routes it traces for consumption. Radically and surreally out of context against the regimented shelves of shampoo, packs of meat, chilled desserts and tins of tuna, these bodies suggest resistance to spaces which are organized according to market logic. Sometimes softly suspended, sometimes apparently flung as if some fantastic energy had blasted and propelled them backwards or forwards, all the bodies here share a quality of quiet detachment. All the facial expressions of Darzacq's subjects are serenely internalized and at moments almost sacred in tenor. Yet these youngsters are at the same time stuck among the consumer goods, still situated in relation to them in the overall context of a society in which we are expected to define ourselves by what we have.

What kind of figure (in the sense of 'trope') do these beautiful hovering bodies provide? One might argue that in their weightless moment of mid-air suspension they cut across and interrupt not only spaces but theories of mobility; that they cannot easily be reabsorbed but remain in fact floating *between* theories; that they are radically out of place theoretically and do not fit anywhere; that they make theory stutter. The metaphysics of flow cannot

account for them (although their energy appeals superficially to such ways of thinking and in one sense they are pure mobility); nor, of course, can a metaphysics of fixity since their interruption is connected to a profound sense of being un-grounded. Their single leap cuts across any 'positive valuation of mobility as progress, as freedom and as change' (Cresswell, 2006: 43) since the jumper is on the way nowhere but down. It is unconnected to any sense of the powerful mobility enjoyed by what Rem Koolhaas, Zygmunt Bauman and other theorists have dubbed the 'kinetic elite'. It interrupts both the giddy verticality of the world of power and money and the celebrated nomadic horizontality which is said by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) to contest that world. Darzacq's figures do not really connect with what Cresswell calls the 'antifoundational metaphysics' of nomadic thought (Cresswell, 2006: 43), even though these figures are never re-territorialized. Nor are they consistent with the rhizomic disruption created by the unexpected, elastic flow of Parkour, which resists prescribed paths through urban terrain, cannily making the most of circumstance to propel the subject forward. They are captured in the midst of single jumps, made on the spot. The importance of each leap is precisely that it does not move but holds its breath in a protest so condensed that it dislodges established theoretical positions on movement as well as calling us to consider the precariousness of individuals in new spatio-temporal and economic global configurations.

In terms of the photographic medium itself as interruption, Darzacq's photos derive part of their meaning from our sense of their being snagged between traditions and techniques. As we study them, we are reminded of the unease experienced by people looking at the earliest attempts to capture movement in photography, because we do not quite believe what we are being shown. We suspect that some post-production trickery has been at work, yet in reality nothing has been tampered with: these are what André Rouillé classifies as 'photo-documents': that is, they stand in objective, 'indexical' relation to the real (Rouillé, 2005: 29–30). For *The Fall* they were taken with a manual camera; for *Hyper* a digital camera was used in order to describe as sharply as possible the range of consumer goods. As Amanda Crawley-Jackson comments, Darzacq's images are nevertheless disruptive of aesthetic regimes for the images, 'at once inconceivable and real' (see Darzacq, 2009: 8), stand in tension between documentary and art photography. They are also, I would argue, disruptive of technical regimes since the images call to both analogue indexicality and the artifice made

possible by digital manipulation. The politics of Darzacq's work reside also in *this* interruptive practice and in the undertow of perceptual shock that tugs at our visual pleasure. Interruption in these first two series of photographs is partially dependent, then, on very subtle kinds of interference generated by the disturbance of category and perception.

### Valérie Jouve: Sidestepping, Holding

In Jouve's photography the idea of interruption works slightly differently. While we are sometimes asked to attend to the arresting of disjunctive and unusual movement whose meaning seems impenetrable (images from Jouve's *Characters* category explore numerous awkward postures and gazes as well as gestures which appear to be connected with shouts or screams) we are also directed to the arresting of unremarkable and familiar movements. What I am interested in for the purposes of this chapter is how Jouve asks us to reconsider, through interruption, the habitual processes in which urban bodies are involved through the course of the working day.

One or two further general points need to be made about how Jouve's city photography works before we turn to explore *Smokers* and *Office Exits*. Jouve's principal device is to interrupt flow and mass by having us focus on a single body in each image. This focus does not betray an interest in the psychology of a given individual, but calls us instead to the *existential scale* of the individual, which is a different proposition. Her *Characters*, for instance, offer us, as the photographer herself puts it, 'singular bodies which affirm themselves in their simple presence, their posture, their consciousness' (Jouve, 2002: 5) and whose enigmatic presence competes with the urban machine: 'for the moment, one voice silences the other' (Jouve, 2002: 5). Jouve's figures thus stand against the idea that the established order might have the last word; she is intent on considering how *they* create meaning and their relationship with the urban context or backdrop is always worth attending to in her work. Notably, we will see that the idea of extraction referred to earlier in this chapter operates in an especially pronounced way in *Office Exits*, and that it is linked in Jouve's work to a drive away from the documentary and towards the abstract. Jouve speaks of her desire to 'get as close as possible to the abstraction of the thing, to its ultimate meaning' (Jouve, 2002: 5); in other words we are not to read her images as driven by realism but by a desire to produce a condensed form of meaning. She speaks

of an image's 'density' of meaning and of the photograph as conceptual fabric: as 'a weave of ideas concentrated in a fixed space' (Jouve and Dumont, 2001: 105).

The first of the series I shall analyse here, *Smokers*, consists of 12 photographs of individuals putting their working day on hold by taking a cigarette break. Each image conforms to a given compositional format: a person stands outside against a pillar which acts as a barrier from the workplace and which is a prop in two senses of the word: it is a visually neutral backdrop (which foregrounds and does not compete with the figure) and it is also a resting place (certain smokers use it as a back rest). Each smoker looks out away from the workplace and, as is customary with Jouve, away from the camera. Each is interrupted in mid-inhalation, holding the same moment of private pleasure (note that smoking here is not social). This interiority maximizes the sense of stillness and extraction achieved in the image. Once again, Jouve's purpose is not to make portraits but to have us explore the choreographic phenomenon of the cigarette break as a specific and deliberate kind of disengagement. Stilling is doubly foregrounded in these images. The bodies in this instance are already still, already interrupting; the second-level interruption of their activity – that effected by the photographer – is a critical interruption designed to bring us to consider what it means to put the working day 'on hold'. The photograph is thus a strategic interruption of an interruption. The series also produces a sense of mechanical reproduction that replicates the automatic gestures of the smokers, and calls attention to the city as machine. These images have, of course, recently taken on a newly subversive resonance given the progressive stigmatization of smokers, prohibitions against smoking in public spaces and increasingly tight legislation about the duration and frequency of cigarette breaks. Although there is nothing inherently unusual about the activities in which the bodies of *Smokers* are involved and although these photographs are not far removed from documentary, they nevertheless share with the bodies of Darzacq's *Hyper* series a quality of being momentarily on hold, sidestepping the structures of capitalism in which they are enmeshed.

The *Office Exits* series follows the impetus of *Smokers*, sharing its interest in extracting bodies which exemplify minimal units of movement from the urban flow, and taking this interest further towards abstraction. In this series Jouve photographs purposeful-looking men and women, clad in the uniform proper to white-collar office workers (serious-looking suits, ties, briefcases), leaving their place of work at the end of the day and about to embark on the commute home. She captures a curious choreography of shared gestures and

postures relating to preoccupation and hurriedness. These walkers provide an unusual contribution to the ever-expanding field of representation and theory accounting for urban bodies on the hoof, from *flâneurs* to urban skimmers to planetary stalkers (Davila, 2002). We are immediately struck by their provision of two levels of interruption. The first is that of arrested movement: each isolated individual is halted in a specific moment, head still full of the day's business, neither quite at work nor quite at rest. The camera plucks them out of the tide of moving bodies, making the moment strange. The second level of interruption is the spatio-existential interruption constituted by cutting these figures off from the contingency of their urban setting, and indeed from any spatial co-ordinates or social space that might situate them in the flow of the external world. As distinct from Jouve's other urban walkers (her *Passers-By* series, for instance, which share their aesthetic with that of Belgian-born photographer Francis Alÿs), the figures are excised from the context which produces them and in which they make sense. Instead, very deliberately, Jouve's post-production manipulation sets them against a grey, monochromatic background; a void with no sense of recession or perspective. They become weightless, on hold not only because they are captured in mid-movement but because they are removed from context and standing in relation to no background at all. If, in Jouve's work, the human body's force of presence usually interrupts the city, here there is nothing left to interrupt: disconcertingly, the materiality of the urban fabric has gone. One might even ask in what sense this still *is* city photography now that all the detail, depth of field and layering that we expect of such photography has been erased.

Suspended in this disturbing interruption of urban photography, walking to and from nowhere (although in the same direction) each individual worker becomes a tiny motif, a punctuation mark, a musical note. After plucking them out of context, Jouve goes on to reassemble her commuters to create a second-order space of circulation and a new set of dialogues between movement and inertia. This is done through the use of montage in her exhibitions and in books where her images are reproduced and carefully situated in relation to each other (McIlwaine, 2010: 204–21). Seen in exhibition, the commuters' gestures are reduplicated, caught in tension between the individual and the larger cortège; between mechanical movement and the performative production of freshly meaningful rhythms. Curiously, Jouve's new choreography strikes up a dialogue with previous landmarks in lens-based studies of human motion. Her little workers are distant relatives of the tiny figures of men and women that we find gathered in

sequence in Eadweard Muybridge's pioneering work on animal locomotion in the late nineteenth century. *Office Exits*, as Quentin Bajec notes, may be indebted to Walker Evans's *Labour Anonymous* project of 1946, a study of workers leaving a factory in Detroit (Bajec, 2010: 17). It is also surely an echo of the first ever documentary film, Louis Lumière's celebrated experimental work of 1895, *La Sortie de l'usine (Leaving the Factory)*. This 45-second sequence showing workers pour out of the Lumière factory in Lyon at the end of the working day focuses on the same cyclical phenomenon of dispersal. We can read Jouve's contemporary study of extraction from the workplace in more than one way. It might seem a playful refusal to leave her workers in thrall to the economic machine. More negatively it might seem instead the very illustration of that thrall including, as Inkster has suggested, the idea of their entrapment in the 'dematerialized flux of late capitalism' (Inkster, 2002: 105) which embeds them in the essentially un-representable, dominant virtual spaces of electronic networks, media technology and global marketing – the spaces, as I observed earlier, that Wei references in his work. Here, in fact, Jouve has organized these interchangeable bodies into a performance of flow itself; of flow as contemporary condition, although the almost carnivalesque atmosphere of Lumière's mass of workers flowing exuberantly and companionably from the factory is replaced by a steely solitariness.

In terms of Jouve's critical use of the medium of photography, like Darzacq she deliberately interrupts any sense of documentary realism, makes the medium strange and creates unease about how it is to be read, producing what Inkster refers to nicely as the 'necessary failure of coincidence that allows legibility to adhere to the image' (Inkster, 2002: 91). This is not mirroring. In fact, *Office Exits* confronts us with evacuation, flatness and opacity. Here the image becomes all surface, reminding us indeed that surface is, in the last analysis, all that photography is. Each of Jouve's photographs thus 'teases photography's deceptiveness' (Jouve, 2002: 5), as she puts it, undercutting the rules of transparent vision: '[c]ollages, the evacuation of perspective, of signs, any bending of the rules', she comments, 'gives me pleasure and draws the tool of photography towards new horizons' (Jouve, 2002: 5).

### Li Wei: Floating, Falling

Although very different in tenor, Wei's photographs can be usefully placed into dialogue with the images already studied in this chapter and with the idea

of a photographic suspension which extracts bodies from the habitual conduits and forms of urban mobility, the better to interrogate the potentially alienating nature of such mobility. Like Darzacq, Wei plays with the ambiguity of an apparent weightlessness. In defying gravity, he seems at once to wrench the subject out of the contemporary urban condition and refer us back to what it means to be systemically locked within it. Like Jouve, his images present disjunctive and unexpected gestures which open up disquieting fields of potential meaning. His is a vertiginous art, consistent with the vertiginous speed and violence of globalization and which catapults subjects into new, impossible spaces and situations. He shares the sense of energetic hypermobility encapsulated in Darzacq's *Hyper* series, the suspended bodies of both photographers emitting a common precariousness. Wei's photographs are the most consistently and overtly theatrical of the examples studied in this chapter, the most reliant on technological and digital supports and the most closely related to the recently emerged trend towards performativity discussed in its introduction. It is with Wei that we see the full implications of Poivert's observation that the contemporary staged photograph no longer refers us back to an originary relationship between photographer and subject, but is instead the outcome of a performance designed to produce a predetermined image for an audience (Poivert, 2010: 211). This shift in emphasis responds to a desire to make urban photographs which are spectacularly adequate to the sense of the moment: to how it feels to inhabit a period of accelerating global flows.

Wei's earlier land-based studies provided a range of experimental approaches to the problem. In 1999 he orchestrated and photographed *Global Village*, a collective action in which dozens of people put their heads through apertures in an immense patchwork of flags, setting the map on the move according to the rhythms of their collective walk. Through this performance Wei hoped to express, as the artist himself puts it, 'a state of confusion and loss in the face of the accelerated changes of Chinese economy and society' (qtd. in Frogier, 2012: 17). A further series of ground-level projects undertaken between 2000 and 2007 relied on the ingenious use of a mirror. Here, Wei walked around city spaces with his head inserted through a hole in a mirror panel held horizontally at shoulder height. The consequent surreal reflections of the urban environment, of passers-by and of Wei's head floating in inverted cityscapes produced a vertiginous loss of bearings and a powerful distancing mechanism whilst setting in motion an optical device already connected to photography's inverted duplication of the material world.



It is, however, not the land-based work that concerns me here but the gravity-defying, mid-air fantasy images for which Wei is now best known. Like the implausible images of performance photographer Philippe Ramette, whose stunts defy everything that we consider non-negotiable in terms of our relationship with the world around us (he strolls and reads a newspaper underwater; hangs suspended in natural or urban settings; walks up walls), Wei uses his own body to question the conditions of life, producing what we might think of as an extended self-portrait to invoke the irrepressible and destabilising forces which buoy or drop him irrespective of his own volition. Such evocations are not without humour and this too is part of Wei's distinctive panoply of interruptive tools. While the interruptions made by Darzacq and Jouve are in many cases open to humour, it is more hesitant, less available and less ironic than in Wei. Wei's work generates wry comedy by its open declaration of artifice, the surreal nature of its gestures, the elaborate devices required to achieve it and, I would argue, by its radical departure from existing traditions of city photography. Projected into the air above the backdrop of Beijing's rampant megalopolis, clinging or attached to the city's elevated structure, or plummeting from it, Wei's malleable, acrobatic body induces the frisson of delight experienced by the spectator of magic tricks. The shock and breathless fear expressed on the artist's face also make the spectator smile, although Wei insists on the authenticity of these emotions which are genuinely experienced during his stunts and not merely performed or produced technically in the Photoshop manipulations which are an important aspect of his image-making process.

Let us turn to examine the singularly powerful photograph entitled *A Pause for Humanity 1* (Figure 2.5). This image, made in Beijing in 2005, once again combines the human and the architectural. It is an image which produces acute unease. It is set on the uppermost metal beams of a high-rise building which, we assume, is under construction. These beams form a grid dividing the upper two-thirds of the image into three blocks, the central one of which is our main focus. Far below and away to the hills on the distant horizon stretch uninspiring, regimented cityscapes, barely relieved by the trees which line the river. In the unlikely context of this wide-scale urban panorama is a family gathering of sorts. In the bottom left-hand corner of the image's central section, sitting on one of the horizontal beams above the vertiginous drop, sits a young woman holding her baby. She appears relaxed as she looks down at the infant, who in turn looks to camera. Above the woman's head, Wei's upside-down body juts out at an acute angle, his feet pointing to the



sky, his body unnaturally tense and stiff. Rather than being suspended in mid-air, he is attached to the vertical beam by a white stretch of material tightly tied around his neck. The discomfort and precariousness of this image operate on numerous levels. An intimate moment of mother-baby tenderness, incongruously staged on a construction site, is threatened by the perilous physical context in which it is performed. It is as though the family group had been caught up in the process of construction and elevated with it to a kind of high-rise homelessness. Further, the human figures in this scene appear to be elements in the expanding urban landscape which are merely equivalent to the metal beams on which they sit, involved in a process of escalating growth but insignificant in themselves. Such a reading is reinforced by the unnatural angle and beam-like rigidity of Wei's own body, which has become locked in to the metal grid needed for the building's completion. This is a particularly powerful piece of photographed theatre. It shares with Darzacq and Jouve a central concern about the destiny of unremarkable and vulnerable subjects caught up in the flows of urban mobility and, through cutting across and interrupting that mobility, it draws us into a powerful critique.

Finally, it is useful to consider Wei's suspended clusters of bodies: those which form a floating human bridge in *Meeting on a Bridge of Magpies* (2011); those in *Life on High 4* (2008) which hang upside down at the entrance to their place of work, suspended by their ankles and forming an inverted pyramid; or those which congeal in a human cloud a few feet above a corrugated rooftop in *Life on High 6* (2008). The bodies cling to each other, climb over each other, stand on each other but also support each other, frozen in acrobatic mimes of tenuous interdependency and, with delicious inappropriateness, evoking not only the efficient (virtual) work-based team but also the clusters of celestial bodies which gather implausibly on clouds in many a religious fresco. Even in community, Li's human figures appear to have no stable place or sense of structure in the globalized world: they are catapulted into its flux, deterritorialized and at permanent risk of crashing to the ground. These groupings induce questions about society and community, both in a specifically Chinese perspective and more generally. As Wei claims – and the international popularity of his photographs seems to corroborate his claim – the symbolic language that he elaborates to situate his subjects is at once culturally rooted in China and universal. His images are thick with questions about his country, his contemporaries and their relationship to globalization. They reference the bewilderingly swift modernization of Beijing, the shifting relationships of gender, family and community and the problem of individual

freedom as well as the contentious status of the individual in Chinese society more generally. The exhibitions into which they are grouped sometimes make direct reference to China: for instance *Transcendence: A Mirror of China* shown in New York at The Artist Network in 2006, or the *Made in China* exhibition at Denmark's Louisiana Museum in 2007. Further, as Gao Minglu observes in a study of the production of meaning in avant-garde Chinese art, the body in Wei becomes 'a site of active resistance to the constant obliteration of the self' (Gao, 2005: 163–164).

Wei's global reach is alluded to in a self-consciously interruptive cross-cultural image of 2006 entitled *Li Wei Falls in France*. In this image, the vertiginous force of mobility which Wei references in his work and its potential for catapulting individuals around the globe are alluded to in a rare depiction of his landing. We see the photographer's upside-down body, rigid as a tree, 'planted' in a lawn with his head below ground level. It is as if he had fallen from a great height and become embedded in this neat sweep of grass flanked by rows of trees which guide our gaze back to an identifiably French country chateau. Beyond its evident surreal humour, this photograph plays on conflicting ideas of image-making: on the one hand, the composition observes the illusionism of Western modernity with its emphasis on perspective and its heavily referenced vanishing point; on the other hand it flagrantly interrupts such visual conventions, disturbing their spatial assumptions with a spectacular self-portrait happening which is symbolic rather than illusionistic and which plants the photographer's head like a metaphorical bulb or root ball. In contrast with our ingrained habit of thinking photography through its proximity to the world, then, Wei achieves strong distancing through his images. Such distance is, however, as Poivert observes of contemporary theatrical photography more generally, 'not a distance of separation, but one of exploration. This is distance as crossing, as *relation*' (Poivert, 2010: 216).

### Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, then, Darzacq, Jouve and Wei work by creating interruptive categories which interrogate forms of mobility, flow and productivity and which are adequate to the contemporary moment. All induce acts of critical looking designed to arrest us as spectators and have us question the conditions and the consequences of globalization. Where documentary photography halted the world in order to draw it to our attention, the frequently excessive

performed images of Darzacq, Jouve and Wei build on this naturalistic halting – in itself, potentially at least, an important critical function – overlaying and redoubling it through performance and extraction to arrest us differently and to challenge our sense of equilibrium. My argument has been that these series of photographs, which are very deliberately intellectual constructs as much as dramatic material images, halt in particularly self-conscious ways; that they act as meta-discourses of the metaphysics of mobility. The self-proclaimed friction with and departure from documentary traditions of street photography which we have observed in the photographs analysed here means that their moorings in the specifics of the urban context are loosened; instead they are observations set apart from that context, yet commenting on it as they attempt to convey generically and metaphorically the powerful sensations of being caught up in unpredictable networks of accelerating processes. It is precisely through heightened interruptions of this nature that *we* can be interrupted, brought momentarily to step outside the conditions of globalization's accelerated mobility, so that those same conditions become newly apparent to us through powerfully politicized visual constructions.

## Notes

- 1 Ideas for this chapter were refined in discussion at two symposia: *Inert Cities* (Institute of Germanic and Romance Studies, London, 7–8 May 2012) and *Photography in Contemporary France* (University of Nottingham, 15 June 2012). Thanks especially to Olga Smith.
- 2 Translations from the French in this chapter are my own.



# 3

## At the Still Point of the Turning World: The Power of the Urban Portrait

Hugh Campbell

### The Urban Portrait

As long as there have been photographic views of cities, there have been photographic portraits of their inhabitants. As Peter Bacon Hales (1984) outlines in his seminal study *Silver Cities*, in the second half of the nineteenth century, an era during which cities were expanding at a rapid pace and during which the technical capacities and aesthetic possibilities of photography were being constantly extended, photographic depictions were dominated by two genres inherited from the traditions of painting – the landscape and the portrait. While the former provided evidence of the ongoing changes in built form and appearance, the latter showed how life was being lived within that built fabric. Typically – necessarily, it might be said – portraits zeroed in closely on their subjects, while landscapes maintained a distance in order to encompass more of the urban architecture. The technical restrictions of the medium – slow shutter speeds, cumbersome apparatuses, delicate negatives – meant that images had to be deliberately constructed rather than spontaneously captured. For portraits, the subjects held stiff poses; for views, periods where the best light coincided with the fewest visible inhabitants were favoured. What emerged was a composite picture of, on the one hand, empty cityscapes with only the occasional blurred figure hinting at inhabitation,

and formal figures facing the camera, their urban surroundings relegated to a muted backdrop. Only with great difficulty, or through serendipity, could a photograph easily reconcile both aspects of urban life.

Of course, technical developments meant that by the early twentieth century, these kinds of restrictions had all but disappeared and, beginning with the work of such pioneers as Jacques Henri Lartigue and Paul Strand, urban people and urban places started to be convincingly fused into coherent images. A mode of picture-making in which people and their surroundings were perfectly congruent began increasingly to dominate. In place of the near and the far, a single spatial register, focused on the middle ground, emerged. And, in place of the stilled, emptied time of the staged portrait and the composed view, a single smooth temporal register became the norm. The classic period of street photography, from the 1930s to the end of the 1960s, is characterized by images of this kind. Whether in the harmonious ‘decisive moments’ of Henri Cartier-Bresson or in the vivid tumult framed by street photographers such as Garry Winogrand, settings and actors formed a coherent whole, each dependent upon the other, the picture only completed by the two together.

By the 1970s, however, this mode of picture-making had begun to appear impotent in the face of social upheaval and urban change, no longer capable of offering insights or making relevant statements. New forms of photographic practice and new subject matter began to emerge: conceptual and formal experiment on the one hand, and sober documentation on the other. As exemplified by the work gathered in the seminal *New Topographics* exhibition of 1972, the suburbs and the edges of new development supplanted the urban centre as the favoured subject matter. Informed in part by these forays into new territories and new techniques, when photography did re-engage with the city, it did so on changed terms. Since the late 1970s a new phase of urban photography has emerged which seeks, once again, to separate the spatial and temporal registers of city and inhabitants. Within this broad sweep of activity can be identified a set of photographic strategies and practices which might loosely be gathered under the term ‘urban portraiture’. The renowned German photographer Thomas Struth uses this term to describe his large detailed images of often anonymous urban scenes, suggesting that, in their layered complexity, these places have a biography and character which make them equivalent to an autonomous living subject. Depicting them as he would sitters for a portrait (another important strand of his practice), Struth ushers what is usually the background into the foreground.

His images are deliberate and painstaking, made with large-format cameras, their preternatural stillness a riposte to the rapidity of urban rhythms.

In the three photographic series which form this essay's central subject matter, the focus is on the individual urban inhabitant rather than the urban fabric, but an equivalent stillness and concentration applies. From Luc Delahaye's series *L'Autre*, made on the Paris Metro (1995–7), to Philip-Lorca diCorcia's *Heads* series, shot in Times Square in 1999, to Michael Wolf's recent *Tokyo Compression* series, made on the Tokyo underground, there is a remarkable formal consistency, even if the means and ends are, in each case, very different. In all three projects, single heads are seen in close-up, the detailed scrutiny of the camera serving to isolate them from their circumstance, even though it is this very circumstance which permits the photographs to be taken in the first place. In each case, some commentary seems to be implied, or least can be inferred, about the contemporary urban condition and its impact upon the sovereign self. Although the physical presence of the city – its spaces, its systems, its scale – is only hinted at, its trace is imprinted on the individuals portrayed. And in each case, the intense concentration on the individual has been achieved through the manipulation of the technical and practical norms of urban picture-making. It is worth dwelling on the detailed realization of each project and specifically on the ways in which temporal and spatial registers are disrupted and recalibrated, a recalibration which extends not just to the subject and its setting, but also to the photographer and the space of the photograph's making. In 'traditional' urban photography, the presence of the photographer is usually intuited through the form and content of the finished photograph: that indexical relationship is integral to the internal coherence of such images. But in the projects being studied here, that relationship becomes less apparent, less reliable and more complex. The presence of the recorded subject no longer connotes the presence of a recording agent.

### ***L'Autre***

In the case of Luc Delahaye's series, the concern with the relationship between the photographer and the unwitting sitter is immediately evident from the title *L'Autre* (*The Other*) and is duly elaborated in Jean Baudrillard's brief accompanying essay. '*Personne ne regard personne*,' he begins, the eloquent symmetry of the sentence not surviving the translation: 'No-one is looking at anyone else.' Baudrillard's essay dwells on the manner in which both subject



3.1 Luc Delahaye, untitled, from *l'Autre*. Courtesy of the artist.

and object disappear in most photography, on the difficulty of breaking the 'vicious circle' of 'everything being in prior collusion with the image' (Delahaye and Baudrillard, 1999). He argues that only by returning to something akin to the camera obscura – that is, to the automatic, unauthored application of technique – might photography regain the capacity to register human presence, precisely by asserting its right to 'not bear witness to anything' (Delahaye and Baudrillard, 1999). The images in the publication demonstrate the thesis. Taken surreptitiously as Delahaye sat opposite riders on the Paris Metro, each fine-grained, black-and-white image scrutinizes a single face, which shows no evident awareness of being photographed. The people seem impassive, grave, revealing little if anything of their inward state of mind.

One of the obvious reference points for Delahaye's project is the series made by Walker Evans in the New York subway (1938–41), and eventually



published in 1966 as *Many Are Called* (Evans, 2004). ‘Down in this swaying sweatbox’, Evans wrote, ‘[the photographer] finds a parade of unselfconscious captive sitters, the selection of which is automatically destined by real chance’ (Evans, 1982: 162). Evans spent days riding the subway car, his Leica concealed inside his coat, the shutter release connected by a cable to his hand. Only when the train halted at the station did it become still enough for him to snatch, unseen, a photograph of the person sitting opposite. He wanted to capture his subjects when ‘the guard is down and the mask is off’, recognizing that ‘even more than when in lone bedrooms (where there is a mirror), people’s faces are in naked repose down in the subway’ (Evans, 1982: 152). The technical limitations of the shots somehow add to their feeling of intimate exposure. Working in the subdued light and unsteadiness of the subway car, Evans had to use fast film and slow shutter speeds, resulting in slightly soft images with a limited tonal range.

But where Evans’ subjects might seem exposed, ‘naked’, the people in Delahaye’s pictures seem more closed and self-contained. Each individual’s intentness seems to suspend time, creating a surrounding orbit of stillness. Michael Fried’s recent analysis of the publication notes:

[T]he cumulative effect as one turns its pages and confronts its ninety portraits – each on the right hand page, facing a page of shiny black – is claustrophobic in its intensity: the extreme proximity of Delahaye’s subjects and the sameness of the compositional schema throw into relief not only the physiognomic, racial and age diversity of the individual riders but equally their uniform determination, as it comes to seem, to absent themselves as much as possible from their immediate circumstances. (Fried, 2007: 113)

Fried is responding to the images’ peculiarly paradoxical quality. On the one hand, they are evident invasions of individual privacy: Delahaye acknowledges that he broke the law by taking them, or ‘stealing them’ as he terms it (Delahaye and Baudrillard, 1999). On the other hand, they reveal nothing of the sitters. However much physical detail, however minutely observed, ‘there is no bringing of these people into psychological “focus”’, as Baudrillard puts it (Delahaye and Baudrillard, 1999). The Other remains unknown, unknowable, in spite of, or perhaps more tellingly, because of, its very availability to view. These pictures, after all, are simply a permanent record of the kind of views that are available to every user of mass public transport in every city every day. However, even with the most commonplace

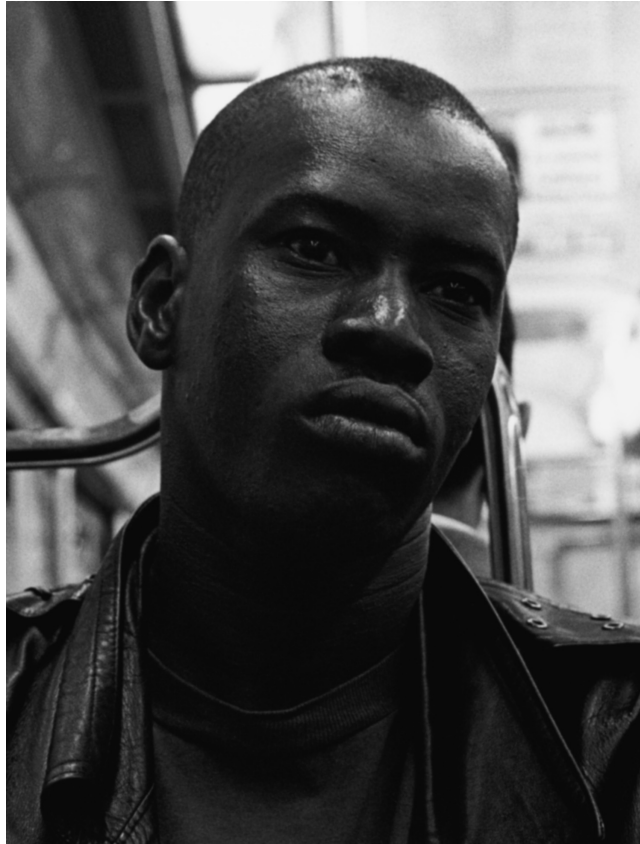


3.2 Luc Delahaye, untitled, from *l'Autre*. Courtesy of the artist.

of views, the manner of its recording can change its significance and meaning, as evidenced by the next series to be considered, Philip-Lorca diCorcia's *Heads*.

## Heads

As the laconic title suggests, diCorcia's large photographs (120 × 150 cm) depict single heads, brightly lit and in sharp focus, picked out from their surroundings. First exhibited and published in 2001, the photographs were taken by diCorcia in Times Square in 1999, using a telephoto lens and a concealed rig of strobe flashes, trained on a marked point on the footpath and linked by a radio transmitter to his camera. Whenever a suitable candidate passed by, diCorcia could, unbeknownst to them, trigger the flashes and take a picture. The long lens produces a very shallow focal plane, so that while the



3.3 Luc Delahaye, untitled, from *l'Autre*. Courtesy of the artist.

heads are crisply in focus, everything surrounding them blurs into darkness. The artificial highlighting of the faces created by the flashes heightens the contrast with the unlit surroundings. Momentarily, unwittingly (and literally) placed under the spotlight, these people remain immersed in their own thoughts and actions and in the broader flow of city life.

The series represented a development of diCorcia's evolving photographic practice in which he used artificial lighting to accentuate the theatricality of everyday scenes. As Peter Galassi writes, 'by tampering in just the right way . . . diCorcia found that he could invest his pictures with the enchantment of fantasy without relinquishing the power of fact' (Galassi, 1995: 12). From initially staging scenes involving his family and friends, diCorcia gradually moved into the public realm. In 1990–2, he produced a series in which he paid rent boys in Hollywood to pose in various locations throughout the area. Arranged, set up and lit in advance, these locations were suggestive of



3.4 Philip Lorca DiCorcia, *Head #1* (2000). Courtesy of Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York.

narratives without telling any specific story. However, as if in response to the overt narrativity of these images, in his subsequent series, *Streetworks*, diCorcia then began to relinquish control of some key elements of his practice. Working in the busy streets of the cities to which his commercial assignments brought him, he would conceal his lighting rig in scaffolding and wait at a safe distance to trigger the lights and release the shutter. The resulting images combined the spontaneous serendipity of street photography with the studied sheen of a studio session. By illuminating the surface of a seemingly banal scene, diCorcia gives it a kind of depth. Stray characters step into the limelight, acquiring a lustrous glow which confers on them a significance not suggested by their demeanour. The sudden flash of light creates diCorcia's equivalent of Cartier-Bresson's 'decisive moment'. These are moments of epiphany, but bestowed from without rather than experienced from within. 'I would hope that the photographs have some kind of emotional life of their own', diCorcia has commented, 'but I try not to have the things depicted be in themselves emotional' (qtd. in Richardson, 2005: 175). The emotion, in other words, inheres in the image more than in what it portrays – or, perhaps more precisely, in what the image connotes about the nature of what is being portrayed.



3.5 Philip Lorca DiCorcia, *Head #23* (2000). Courtesy of Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York.

‘[T]he street does not induce people to shed their self-awareness’, comments diCorcia: ‘[t]hey seem to withdraw into themselves. They become less aware of their surroundings, seemingly lost in themselves. Their image is the outward facing front belied by the inwardly gazing eyes’ (qtd. in Dexter and Weski, 2003: 258). The *Heads* series allowed him to hone right in on the source of this unsettling duality, editing out everything but the luminous floating visages, all, according to his schema, facing outwards and looking inwards. Like Delahaye’s subjects, they are absent presences. But Delahaye was working on the Metro, where riders might naturally withdraw into themselves, setting their features with the expectation of being visible and open to being regarded for the duration of their journeys. By contrast, diCorcia’s subjects are immersed in the flow of the urban crowd, where the guarantee of passing unnoticed and unexamined might be expected to permit a more open, expressive demeanour. Certainly diCorcia’s dramatic lighting and vivid colour confer a different mood on the pictures. While Delahaye’s even-toned, modestly-sized black-and-white prints sit comfortably within the documentary tradition and seem therefore suited to the close description of instances of urban life, diCorcia’s monumentally-scaled pictures tap into

very different pictorial sources, combining the lustre of magazine advertising with the chiaroscuro of baroque portraiture.

There is an interesting disjuncture between what appears to be a highly deliberate, expressive picture-making and the technical realities of the project. Having set up his rig and marked the spot at which a person would step into the focal plane of his lens, such was the speed of pedestrian traffic through Times Square that diCorcia had no time to look through the lens: all he could do was click the shutter blindly at the right moment. 'In the beginning of my photography I controlled everything: rearranging the room, lighting it, and telling people what to do and where to put their hands. By the last project, I was basically totally at the mercy of serendipity' (qtd. in Richardson, 2005: 173). The recording process becomes almost automatic – the unseeing photographer shooting the unwitting pedestrian. Out of this process emerges a peculiar moment of encounter which, again, is marked by stillness and focus. The split second of the shutter's opening and the split second of the stranger's passing the lens combine to produce an image which seems unexpectedly, almost irreconcilably, freighted with significance and meaning. It is hard to believe that the subjects are oblivious to their participation in this kind of picture-making, but it is their very obliviousness which gives the pictures their power, and which allows them to be made. When that delicate arrangement is threatened, the picture's air of momentous significance is disrupted. When Erno Nussenzweig, an Orthodox Jew, recognized himself in one of the published images from the series, he sued the artist and his gallery, Pace/MacGill, for exhibiting and profiting from his 'image'. The case was eventually decided in diCorcia's favour, with the artistic right to free expression trumping Nussenzweig's claim to privacy. The case hung on whether the recording of someone's face, when they are out in public and hence open to view, could be considered an invasion of privacy. The logic of the final judgement was that, as much as the facades of buildings (as opposed to their interiors), people's faces (indeed their entire bodily form) form part of the continuum of the public realm rather than being closed, private entities.

It might be said that it is precisely the tension inherent in this conjunction of private self and public space which diCorcia's images elucidate. It might further be argued that it is precisely the presence of myriads of private selves in public spaces which constitutes the urban condition in the first instance. However vast and complex its physical infrastructure, however rich and varied its architectural form, the city always comes down to this moment,





**3.6** Philip Lorca DiCorcia, *Head #13* (2000). Courtesy of Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York.

where the sovereign self participates in the collective order. And it is this moment which diCorcia depicts.

### Tokyo Compression

The photographs in Michael Wolf's *Tokyo Compression* series have been published in three successive publications since 2010, each reprising and extending the previous selection of images (Wolf, 2010, 2011b, 2012). The images show, in close-up, riders on the Tokyo Underground. From the faces pressed against the glass doors of the crowded carriages, single subjects are framed. Their eyes are often closed, their expressions mournful. The condensation fogging the glass has the effect of blurring the image, and also of introducing a second surface between the viewer and the subject. The faces are often pressed tight against this surface, their noses flattened, their lips distorted. Many of the visages seem almost like death masks – pale, rigid, drained of life. And yet, as with diCorcia's images, the emotional weight of the images belies the quotidian circumstances of their making. Wolf explains the genesis of the project:

In 1997, . . . I was working on a story for Stern magazine in Tokyo. This is how I happened to be on this one train station. The peculiar thing about this station is that there is only one track and not two. So when the people get in on one side



3.7 Michael Wolf, untitled, from *Tokyo Compression*. Courtesy of the artist.

of the train I can get right up next to the window of the other side. There's no track separating me from the train. So I took a series of five pictures at that time. When I got back to Hong Kong and looked at the developed Kodachromes they were so powerful, the way these people were looking out of the window so I filed them away in my folder for future reference with topics I want to do at some point. In 2008/2009 I went back and spent a total of thirty days there. Always from Monday to Friday, always during rush hour in the morning from 7.30 until about 8.45. Every thirty seconds a train would roll in, I would take my pictures and at 8.45 I would go back to the hotel. (Wolf, 2011a)

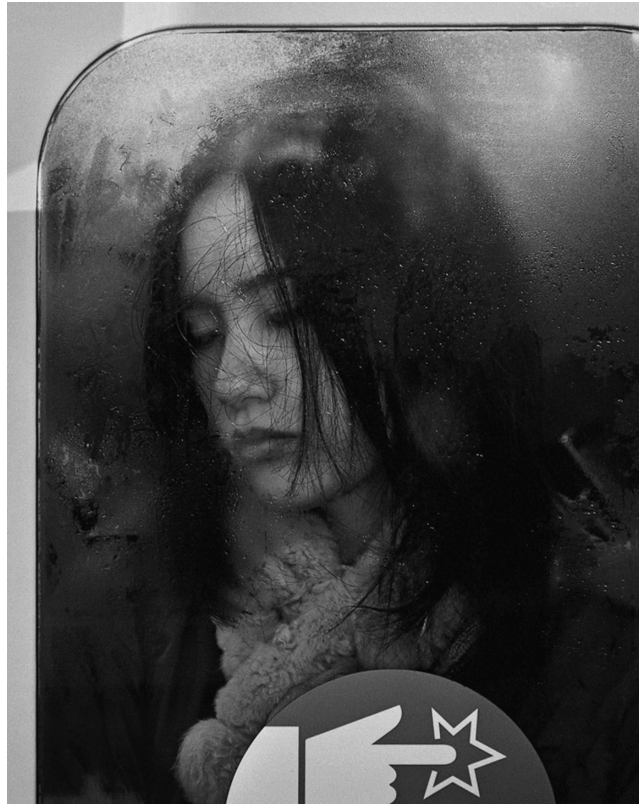
For Wolf, as it had for Delahaye, the Underground provided the circumstances in which a certain kind of forced intimacy and unexpected proximity was available. Despite the separation provided by the glass, Wolf's subjects were fully exposed to his camera's scrutiny. 'I worked extremely close. I could get up to 3 or 4 inches away,' he explains (Wolf, 2011a). As distinct





3.8 Michael Wolf, untitled, from *Tokyo Compression*. Courtesy of the artist.

from the discretion and distance maintained by diCorcia, Wolf makes himself evident to his subjects. Downcast eyes and sullen grimaces are testament to their awareness of being photographed, and their inability to intervene or escape. This is a real rather than a constructed proximity, although Wolf does augment the impact by tightly framing the faces: '[t]he most important decision for me was to crop all the images so that it was a book of "portraits", not of subway windows' explains Wolf (n.d., interview with G. Arena), thus deliberately removing the images from the context of their making and identifying them with the genre of portraiture. (Walker Evans had made an equivalent decision to tighten the framing on his subway shots between their making and their publication.) This decontextualization serves to shift the emotional register of the images, lending individual facial expressions a heightened sense, so that disgruntled commuters in crowded trains are recast as lost, sorrowful voyagers through the city. Where diCorcia's heads floated in deep inky black space, Wolf's faces are immersed in a warm damp fog, like



3.9 Michael Wolf, untitled, from *Tokyo Compression*. Courtesy of the artist.

preserved specimens pressing against the surface of their container (we might be looking at pickled fruit in a jar). And where Delahaye's subjects retained an air of inviolate impregnability, here the pale, pressed skin makes the subjects seem exposed, as if an outer layer had been penetrated. Compression, referred to in the title and evident in every image, threatens each subject's autonomy. Delahaye's subjects seemed particular and situated. DiCorcia's retained that individuality even as they became disembodied and divorced from context. But for Wolf's, even the limits of selfhood are now being pressed against, to the point of disintegration. It is as if, in the space of the three series, we have moved from Diego Velasquez's portrait of Pope Innocent X to Francis Bacon's flayed, distorted reinterpretation of it.

What might be discerned evolving across these three projects is an increasingly bleak evaluation of the way in which the contemporary city impacts upon the individual, and to conclude that the very idea of selfhood is now under threat by the forces that shape the contemporary metropolis.

Nonetheless, the human being remains the central focus of each series: each photographer chooses to look at single individuals as a way of making sense of the city.

### At the Still Point of the Turning World

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,  
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,  
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.

(T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, 1936)

In reviewing these three recent exercises in urban portraiture, a number of ideas and practices have clearly emerged. Perhaps primarily, there is a shared faith in the potential of the urban portrait as a means through which to convey something of the contemporary urban condition. In each project, while the single human head is the overt subject, what it is actually being explored is the nature of individual experience in a crowded metropolis. Secondly, there is a calm quietude common to all three projects, even though their pictorial language and emotional temperature varies considerably. The presence of the human head in each instance, whether it has been photographed in motion or in repose, serves to stabilize and still the images. This stillness seems to amplify that capacity which has always been central to the medium of photography – the capturing and freezing in perpetuity of a fleeting moment. Photographs hold time in suspension; these images suggest that heads do too. The ceaseless flux of contemporary urban life can only ever in fact proceed as quickly as it can be experienced by any single consciousness which acts, in Eliot's terms, as 'the still point of the turning world'. Following Eliot's thinking, this still point should not be thought of as fixity, but rather as that upon which movement depends ('Except for the point, the still point, / There would be no dance and there is only the dance'). Each individual head serves as the specific fulcrum around which everything pivots while remaining part of the ongoing urban 'dance'.

In representing this interplay between the still point and the turning world, each photographer uses different strategies to insert himself into the scene, establishes different protocols and deploys different techniques. Delahaye's work might be considered the most balanced and naturalistic, in that the

images offer an accurate representation of the transaction that occurred – the photographer sat at a certain distance across from the unwitting sitter and took a photograph. That same distance is maintained in the finished images – far enough away for observation, close enough for empathy. In Wolf’s work, polite codes of distance and discretion are more thoroughly disrupted. Now the photographer is working very close in, separated only by the doors of the subway train from those depicted. Accordingly the close cropping and distortion of the features make it feel as if the subjects are about to breach the picture plane itself – they are barely contained. Thus, the invasiveness experienced by those photographed translates into an equivalent feeling for the viewer. Compression works in both directions.

In the case of diCorcia, the equation between proximity and distance changes again. In order to get close, he withdraws to a distance. His telephoto lens then allows him to breach the distance he has established and come very close to the subjects, so that they in turn seem to loom close to the viewer. However, the distance inherent in their making does endure in the finished pictures. Even though the heads are larger than life, and a little too close for comfort, they nonetheless retain their complete separateness – they stay apart from us.

Alfred Hitchcock’s pioneering ‘dolly zoom’ technique (imitated since by Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorsese among many others) allowed him to zoom in on a subject while simultaneously pulling the camera away. The effect of this was to have the central subjects stay in place and at a stable size, while the backdrop receded smoothly. DiCorcia achieves something almost equivalent: attention holds on the heads, everything else recedes.

The final and most important trait that all three projects share is that they take major global cities as their territory. Only a metropolitan centre of a certain scale and complexity could provide the conditions – both physical and social – necessary to the making of these photographs. Only in such cities would the specific interplay of proximity and distance be possible. The Tokyo Underground, the Paris Metro, Times Square: each conditions the means by which the life it contains can be recorded. Each is premised on movement. Each sustains enormous populations in transit every day. Each seems the very embodiment of the mobile urban milieu.

It has become a commonplace in contemporary theory and in artistic depictions to present the city as the pulsating confluence of mighty forces. For Manuel Castells, these forces formed the abstract space of flows of modern capital. In *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982) and many other documentary and feature

films since, these forces are constituted by the ceaseless multiplication of daily journeys and transactions. In computer games, these forces feel more brutal, giving rise to a continuously unfurling procession of violent action. But whether abstract, temporal or visceral, common to all these versions of globalized urbanity is the invocation of perpetual movement as its governing trope. As recorded in these photographs, however, cities are no longer seen primarily as conduits of movement. They are containers of stillness. And the anonymous, heaving crowds are re-envisaged as constellations of individual souls.



# 4

## Parkour and the Still Image

Bill Marshall

The emergence of Parkour in the late 1980s in the Parisian suburb of Lisses was the result of a confluence of determinants. The outlook of David Belle and Sébastien Foucan, the two founders of the first Parkour group (named *Yamakasi*, the word for ‘strong spirit’ in the Lingala language of the Congo), was shaped by the heritage of mixed-race parentage and communities; by the top-down, planned and often neglected, alienating environment of the *banlieues*; by, in Belle’s case, family links to the French army of Indo-China and the Paris fire service; and by the influence of martial arts and other aspects of popular culture associated, for them, with mental and physical empowerment. Since then, Parkour (also known as free running, or *l’art du déplacement*), consisting of a variety of running leaps, flips and acrobatics that aims to find new pathways – *parcours* – through (sub)urban environments, has proliferated in multiple guises, helped by media appearances (a 2002 BBC promotion clip, ‘Rush Hour’, featuring Belle, the Channel Four documentaries *Jump London* and *Jump Britain* from 2003–5, Foucan’s appearance in a chase sequence in 2006’s *Casino Royale*), and by dissemination on YouTube and other ~~Internet~~ sites which has generated communities and networks, and world-wide groups of Parkour practitioners.

It has not been difficult for academics and cultural commentators to draw on well-established paradigms in urban Cultural Studies to dissect the phenomenon. The ‘re-imagining of place’ (Saville, 2008) which it implies can be located helpfully in relation to Situationism (the spotting of fissures in the organization of the urban landscape, creating opportunities for play

and for the aesthetic *détournement* of given pathways and structures); and the negotiation of new pathways through the city can turn the *traceur* into the *banlieue*'s response to the *flâneur*. 'Is the *traceur* just a practicing *flâneur* with locomotive purpose or a drifting Situationist with a concerted mindset?' asked Shawn Shahani (2008). Michel de Certeau's distinctions between *parcours* and *carte*, tactics and strategies, speak to the practice of this new way of walking in the administered spaces of the *banlieue* housing estates as well as in the global city where the built environment 'both expands and expends capital' (Cuthbert, 2003: 29). For de Certeau, these tactics are the 'faultlines opened up in particular conjunctures within the surveillance of proprietary power. Tactics poach and create surprises, can be there where they are not expected, tactics are ruse' (de Certeau, 2000: 61). We could substitute for 'walker' here the *traceur*, who

transforms every spatial signifier into something else... he increases the number of possibilities (e.g. by making up shortcuts or detours) and the number of interdictions (e.g. by avoiding routes regarded as licit or obligatory)... Thus he creates *discontinuity*, either by choosing among the signifiers of the spatial language or by altering them by the use he makes of them. (de Certeau, 2000: 107)

On the other hand, disquiet can also be expressed when the mainstreaming – even amounting to corporate sponsorship – of Parkour's spectacularization seems to threaten the 'resistance' offered by the 'authentic' form (see the analysis of the distinction between the Belle/Foucan heritage in Atkinson and Young, 2008: 62). This essay avoids these classic 1980s paradigms of subcultural analysis more suited to a modernist politics than anything on offer today, instead favouring a recognition of the context-driven, ambiguous and indeed non-totalisable nature of Parkour (Archer, 2010; Marshall, 2010). Indeed, the tension is already there in the meta-discourse surrounding the phenomenon, between de Certeau's *parcours* and the *parcours de combattant* which is associated with the historical figure of Georges Hébert before and after the First World War and a theorizing of a *méthode naturelle* that drew on idealized colonized bodies in constructing physical education methodologies that fed into army assault courses throughout the world, including those practised by David Belle's father. Rather than becoming bogged down in the resistance versus appropriation binary, we may speak therefore of a process of *subculturalization* that can affect movements (or 'urban social formations')





4.1 Parkour ad for *The Economist*. Courtesy of the magazine.

such as Parkour, but which do not reduce them. Rather, they remain ‘in flux’, ‘in between’: ‘it is the immanent stories of USFs that are considered crucial . . . those that are open and intangible’ (Daskali and Mould, 2013: 2).

As we have seen, the proliferation of Parkour in various media was largely dependent on that of moving images of *traceurs*. To the British examples alluded to above we can add the French feature films *Yamakasi: Les Samourais des temps modernes* (2001), *Banlieue 13* (2005) and *Banlieue 13 – Ultimatum* (2009), in which Parkour forms the basis of action movie narratives. On the back of the moving image, however, has come a plethora of still images of Parkour, on fan sites and also in advertising, most notably perhaps the notorious image for *The Economist*’s subscription campaign (Figure 4.1), with its ambiguous reversal of the meanings (economic and political/aesthetic, price and value) attached to the word ‘free’. In the context of a project on cities and interruption, then, the still photograph of the *traceur* in flight, framed against the urban built environment, would seem to cry out for scrutiny as an example of the arresting of movement, not least when its commercial exploitation would seem to freeze and render inert its resistant aspirations. However, just as the narrative film features in fact close down Parkour in their ideological resolutions as much as they open it up to movement and spectacle, so does photography, in non-professional hands and also as part of conscious artistic practice, both challenge the stillness/movement binary and delve more deeply into the kind of interruptions Parkour offers.



4.2 Kevin. Vauxhall Gardens, London. Photo by Andy Day. Courtesy of the artist.

In the rest of this chapter, I shall look at examples of Parkour photography by two London-based artists, Andy Day and Diego Ferrari, less from the outlook of their distinct artistic visions (though this aspect is not discarded), and more from that of the encounter between a subject and an artistic practice – in a sense, a genre. In Figure 4.2, Day's composition is typical of much of his and others' practice. Shirley Jordan has argued that the agendas of contemporary city photography include pitting the individual 'against a backdrop of the sprawl, the massive and the mass', so that an examination of the city's spatial excess fascinates, disorients and poses the problem of how to dwell within (Jordan, 2009: 137). The issue is also raised, of course, of the status of the photographer himself/herself, and of the (potential power) relationships involved in terms of detachment and openness (like a contemporary *flâneur*), or even omniscience, vis-à-vis his/her subject. It is immediately apparent that there is something quite distinctive about Day's image in relation to the work of artists Jordan examines. The cluttered monumentality of Andreas Gursky's work is answered here by an emphasis on the low-angle shot which suggests a single point of view at ground level and not a panoptic surveillance system. (Indeed one of the very few high-angle images of *traceurs* in the whole vast corpus of Parkour photography is simply a computer-generated fantasy created to show off Parisian landmarks, for the



4.3 National Theatre 1 (2010). Photo by Diego Ferrari. Courtesy of the artist.

*Yamakasi* poster.) And the image of the *traceur* in flight, caught against the backdrop of 1960s office or residential brutalism, is all about angles within the shot pointing out-of-frame in multiple ways. In Parkour photography, the out-of-frame is set at a multitude of often very oblique angles, rather than the purely vertical that characterizes, say, Denis Darzacq's project *La Chute* (2007). Attention is drawn to the city and the way that Parkour as 'an instance of the unruly intersection between capital flow and human bodies' has the potential to demonstrate how this intersection may occur 'at angles of varying and appositional intensities' (Thomson, 2008: 251–2). Rather than the right angle and vertical axes that connote Darzacq's metaphor as he shoots street acrobats in mid-air but falling – often with a tantalizing hint of domesticity provided by a doorway in the background – Day here emphasizes neither belonging nor its loss, but a nomadic movement through city space that provides new ways of looking, both for the *traceur* and the viewer. Key to this is the fact that the photographer is also a participant observer.

In Figure 4.3, from his collection *Urban Habitat: A Coexistence of the Senses*, Diego Ferrari, shooting in the same plane as his subject, contrasts the right angles of concrete steps and steel handrails with the fluidity – liquidity even – of the *traceur* flowing over them. Conscious of the relationships between space and democracy, he writes that 'a lived in space always transcends geometry and measurability' (Ferrari, 2012), a notion to whose implications for 'smoothness' we shall return. Ferrari, born in Argentina in 1965 and very much marked by the experience of dictatorship there, indicates in his writing

what lies behind his approach to photographing Parkour, namely a libertarian attitude faced with regulation, emphasizing

photography's relationship to immanence – to the immediacy of... existences, and to where [we] are, at that moment, in space and time. Photography becomes not so much an activity or art form but a method of communication, an attitude of freedom and autonomy, in both the personal and the sociopolitical public realm. The modern city is full of commodified signs. Public space, with its original promised values of democracy, has become more and more occupied by the market and also simultaneously more and more supervised, in the name of public order and security. Some of this occupation is obvious and objectively visible, but other aspects are internal, hidden, and subjective. Affluence, noise, messages engineered to produce consumption – all create a significant barrier to the subjective nature of being in the city, to the individual's experience of urban environment, and, on a larger scale, to the phenomenology of self. (Ferrari, 2009: 36)

While this might suggest an emphasis, in his Parkour photographs, on issues of transgression, it also raises questions about time and the moment, the instantaneity of the photograph but also the action of slowing down time and perception.

This probing of the experience of doing or watching Parkour provided by the photograph suggests, then, that the interruption is as much to do with the practice itself as with the still image. How can this be when the emphasis in discussions of Parkour is on flow, movement and the nomadic? The paradox can be answered in several ways. Already, we might argue that Parkour's origins in the suburbs signal a decelerating and decelerated response to the dominance of the motor car in that planned environment. Moreover, the breaking down of the components of Parkour that photography permits reveals a subtle interchange between movement and stillness inherent to the practice. This is best examined by looking in turn at preparation, flight and landing sites.

## Preparation

Figure 4.2 is also a mental image. Interviewed about his exhibit *Let Go: Moment in Movement* that debuted in 2011 at the Furman Gallery of the Walter Reade Theatre at Lincoln Center in New York City, James Starkman



4.4 Pete. Heygate, Elephant and Castle, London. Photo by Andy Day. Courtesy of the artist.

explained: ‘As I started to follow them, it became apparent how much of the process is mental, not just physical. That’s what got me interested in capturing them in moments that revealed their mental state rather than just the moves’ (Luckstone, 2011). Figures 4.4–4.6, taken from Andy Day’s portfolio, are



4.5 Dominic. Brownfields, All Saints, London. Photo by Andy Day. Courtesy of the artist.





4.6 James. Brownfields, All Saints, London. Photo by Andy Day. Courtesy of the artist.

contemplation shots, as the *traceur* prepares for the leap. (The first is taken in the notorious Heygate Estate in the Elephant and Castle area of south London, built in 1974 in Le Corbusier style but now derelict and awaiting demolition.) Secondary literature on this moment abounds in references to stillness and to the sensation of time slowing. Thus extreme sports participants, in contrast to their usual characterisation as ‘thrill-seeking adrenaline junkies’, ‘describe moments of ineffability that include enhanced, sensory, mental and physical prowess, perceptions of time slowing, returning to a primal state, feelings of floating and flying and a deep intimacy with the natural world’ (Brymer, 2005: 6). Often, the discourses available to Parkour practitioners to evoke

the change in mental state involved are those associated with non-Western traditions of martial arts and Buddhism. Thus the Québécois *traceur* and writer Vincent Thibault links the ‘inner peace’ (*paix intérieure*) sought in Parkour to Bruce Lee and indeed the Buddha himself (Thibault, 2012: 37, 100–2). What is more, these photos by Day, and especially Figure 4.5, are very reminiscent of the sculptor Antony Gormley’s *Event Horizon* project (2007), in which he placed casts of his body on rooftops in central London:

The sculptures are not statues. As indexical copies of my body they are the registration of a particular time of a particular body which, in their displacement of air, indicate the space of ‘any’ body; a human space within space at large. . . . During the installation of EVENT HORIZON in London in 2007, it was great to see an individual or groups of people pointing at the horizon. This transfer of the stillness of sculpture to the stillness of an observer is exciting to me: reflexivity becoming shared. The conceit in all this is that in observing the works dispersed over the city viewers will discover that they are the centre of a concentrated field of silent witnesses; they are surrounded by art that is looking out at space and perhaps also at them. In that time the flow of daily life is momentarily stilled. (Gormley, 2007)

We shall see momentarily that the *register* of stillness in terms of the contemplative *traceur* in preparation for movement on a rooftop or parapet can parallel not only the inert metal body of Gormley’s work, but also the complicity between object, artist and viewer that arises in that very stillness.

In the section ‘The Smooth and the Striated’ of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari propose a relationship, rather than an opposition, between, on the one hand, the striated space of administration, measurement, dimension and ultimately of the sedentary; and, on the other, a smooth space which is directional, open, without fixed assignments, characterized by endless variability, nomadic. The ocean is the smooth space par excellence, but also an object of striation, through technologies of navigation associated with latitude and longitude. Smooth, nomadic space is characterized by the subordination of the dwelling or habitat to the journey [*parcours*]. But just as the smooth ocean can be striated, so can the striated space par excellence, the city, partake of the smooth: ‘the city is the force of striation that imparts smooth space’, which can take the form of ‘sprawling, temporary, shifting shanty towns of nomads and cave dwellers, scrap metal and fabric, patchwork, of which the striations of money, work or housing are no longer even



4.7 Matthew Amitage, *After Limits* (2009). Photo by Diego Ferrari. Courtesy of the artist.

relevant' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 481). What is more, Deleuze and Guattari's description of the pre-striated sea as a space of affects characterized by an eminently *haptic* perception, in which matter is less organized into optically perceived shapes than into physical materials signalling forces, is very evocative of the practice of Parkour in the urban landscape: '[i]t is an intensive rather than extensive space, one of distances, not of measures and properties' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 479).

Diego Ferrari has a particularly beautiful example of this at work when he photographs a *traceur* – significantly not isolated but placed in a group with his comrades – as the palm of his hand descends or rises to feel a material surface from which he may produce movement (Figure 4.7). The detail can justifiably be described as an example of Roland Barthes's *punctum*, the everyday detail, here the infinitesimal gap between hand and stone surface, that establishes a direct relationship between viewer and viewed. But whereas for Barthes the *punctum*'s terrifying defeat of time was over-determined by memory and death, here the play of unthought (by subject and photographer) and thought (by viewer) is reversed and complicated: all are bound up in a play of intensities which is as much future-directed or virtual (the tiny detail that will or may be productive of a Parkour move) as it is about a memory of a past moment.

We have begun to see, then, that the practice of Parkour, and of Parkour photography, produces paradoxical and interdependent relations of space, time and movement, with its 'smooth' and nomadic associations enabling nomadic decelerations and non-static immobilities. This, and the relevance



of the micro-example provided by the Ferrari photo, is summarized well by Stephen John Saville:

Parkour is not always the super-mobile practice one might imagine. Hours spent in a relatively small area slowly 'getting to know' the space is the norm. Embodied knowledge and familiarity of place is gained as place is tried. (Saville, 2008: 11)

With the aim

of wresting emotionality away from bureaucratic controls and complex systems, and placing it within reach, as something immediately 'touchable', that can be slowly and intimately worked upon. (Saville, 2008: 16)

## Flight

We have already noted the importance in Parkour photography of the multiplicity of angles and their challenging relation to the out-of-field. For Deleuze in his cinema books, the out-of-field refers 'to what is neither seen nor understood, but is nevertheless perfectly present', and thus still part of the cinematographic image. Thus all that the camera does not frame, and the sound that is not directly linked with an object or subject within the image, both constitute the larger set, or 'plane [*plan*] of genuinely unlimited content' (Deleuze, 2005a: 16), of which the in-field is a set within (and the Whole is a thread of these sets of sets). There are two implications here for photography. One is the relation between the *relative* aspect of the out-of-field which implies something not seen but which can be (in the next shot in cinema, in the next photograph in a sequence), and the *absolute* aspect by which the closed system (the shot) opens on to 'a duration which is immanent to the whole universe':

In one case, the out-of-field designates that which exists elsewhere, to one side or around; in the other case, the out-of-field testifies to a more disturbing presence, one which cannot even be said to exist, but rather to 'insist' or 'subsist', a more radical Elsewhere, outside homogeneous space and time. (Deleuze, 2005a: 18)

Deleuze does not hesitate to employ the word 'spiritual' to explain what is happening in the 'absolute' out-of-field constructed in the films of Carl Theodor Dreyer or Michelangelo Antonioni.



4.8 Matthew Amitage, *After Limits* (2009). Photo by Diego Ferrari. Courtesy of the artist.

The second implication for photography lies in fact in this problematic relation with the cinematic image. Famously, Henri Bergson in *Matter and Memory* (1896) had critiqued the Cartesian bias of the photographic image for the way, ‘like an organ of perception’, it fixed a point of view or perspective, whereas in his metaphysics the universe consists of an infinity of points of view, the eye is in things (Bergson, 1990: 39). Bergson understood the photo (and photogram of cinema) as simply stringing together moments, breaking the world up into discrete elements (like the spatiality and intervals of a clock face), therefore missing the key to time that is ‘duration’, the becoming that endures and which swells each present moment with the past. Deleuze rescued cinema for this by positing indirect (‘movement-image’) and direct (‘time-image’) images of time.

The argument having been made earlier about angles, what is happening in the much more abstract Diego Ferrari photo at Figure 4.8? We have seen that Parkour photography implies much more in temporal terms than a relation to pastness, so that it is not confined to notions of chronological time. In *Photography, Cinema, Memory: The Crystal Image of Time*, Damian Sutton argues for a continuity between still photography and cinematography, where the photograph ‘balances succession or progression of time between past and future’, presenting the viewer ‘with an image that is static but that nonetheless can give a powerful sensation of time passing’ (Sutton, 2009: 38). His analysis of Richard Drew’s 9/11 ‘falling man’ sequence is relevant here:

On its own the image implies an out-of-field space of the photograph, a continuance of time and space . . . Time no longer flows from movement, for that movement has been halted, or *annihilated*, by the photograph – *and yet* change will endure. This is a qualitative change limited only by the time of the look. It is not the true ending of the fall that gives the photograph its true impression on memory but the possibility the photograph represents – that Briley is not falling but flying. The impossible posture of the photograph defies the logic of movement; it defies even time as logical progression – *chronological time*. (Sutton, 2009: 59)

Figure 4.8 represents the past of what was, the future of its past encountered in the gaze of the viewer, a contraction therefore of past and present. However, since it has left behind any motor-material connection, the image of a half-naked man facing back towards a rent or tear in the sky opens up immensities, ‘of past and future’ (Deleuze, 2005a: 49), but also of radical signification in its defiance of spatial and temporal logic. It opens out to a universe of possibilities, including virtual and fantasy worlds. Parkour clearly lends itself to the classic Deleuzian formulation of lines of flight, taken literally to include both escape and flying. But the real force of the term lies in the encounter between the multiplicities of Parkour and new multiplicities, which the photograph is here able to offer.

### Landing sites

Landing, and the landing site, are arguably the most important – and hazardous – aspects of Parkour technique, and the least represented in still photography (see Andy Day’s image, Figure 4.9. Another London-based photographer, Jonathan Lucas, has experimented with digitally enhanced, non-indexical images which portray the whole sequence of postures and movements from take-off to landing – see Figure 4.10 – so that the three key components of Parkour movement are represented in one frame as opposed to separate photographic ‘genres’). As many of the other essays in this volume remind us through their problematization of the orthodoxy around flows and movement that characterizes urban cultural analysis, there is no ‘pure’ concept of mobility that does not always also depend on its counterweight; here, to mix metaphors, friction. For example, in *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing deploys the



4.9 Ben 'Bam' Milner jumping at Imax, Waterloo, October 2003. Photo by Andy Day. Courtesy of the artist.

metaphor of friction to explore the diverse, messy and conflicting interactions across contemporary global societies. These 'awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference' that constitute the 'grip of encounter' are what need to be understood faced with the 'popularity of stories of a new era of global motion in the 1990s' in which motion without friction would lead to self-actualization and 'oil the machinery of the economy, science, and society' (Tsing, 2004: 5). On the contrary, wheels turn because of contact with the surface of the road, and, appropriately for our purposes, 'how we run depends on what shoes we have to run in' (Tsing, 2004: 4).



4.10 Trajectory. Photo by Jonathan Lucas. Courtesy of the artist.

The mobility and motility of the Parkour *traceur* are deeply embedded in the materiality of the built environment – concrete, brick, metal, grass – and of footwear, bag and clothing. These materialities possess their own mobility (Saville, 2008: 897), in the sense of activating the potential for movement they contain, but they also remind us of the constant oscillation between movement and rest which Spinoza described in his *Ethics*: ‘bodies are distinguished from one another in respect of motion and rest, quickness and slowness, and not in respect of substance’ (Spinoza, 2006: 37). Deleuze and Guattari are partly indebted to this formula as they develop their concepts of territorialization and deterritorialization. Territorialization is the code of grounding, in which the flows (of meaning, desire) are checked; through deterritorialization, a process of un-coding and un-fixing, they are relaunched, perhaps to be reterritorialized. To take one example from *A Thousand Plateaus*, hyperinflation can be said to deterritorialize the money supply, but the introduction of a new currency makes reterritorialization possible. As with the smooth and the striated, these are to be seen not as binary oppositions but as processes in interaction; coding and decoding are inseparable. In industrial capitalism, the territorializations of earlier, sedentary and agricultural societies are replaced by a more groundless ‘axiomatic’ of profit and accumulation, and so on.

In contrast to the largely individualized images examined earlier in this essay, Figure 4.10 actually suggests a non-anthropocentric way of looking at the movement of Parkour, whose ‘potential for alternative movements and routes through a close dialogue with the architectural ground...enables a practice of becoming bodies that manifest in a flash as bodies of different registers of motion and rest’ (Brunner, 2011: 144). The key Bergsonian and Deleuzian term of ‘becoming’ – as emergence, transition and change that has no final outcome – implies therefore a de-centred relationship between bodies that is created and renewed through movement. It is interesting therefore that in Figure 4.10 the emphasis is not on the individual, nor on the beginning or end result, but on an apprehension of this whole process of becoming, aided of course by the digital image’s creation of virtual worlds and its break with analogue technology’s relation to the ontological real.

Drawing on the work of architects and artists Madeline Gins and Shusaku Arakawa, Christoph Brunner depicts in Parkour the movement of an architectural body – a body as an ‘organism-person-environment’ which consists of sites and would-be sites:

What Parkour does then is emphasize the intermixed character of its practices that interweaves in its action different bodies (surroundings, organisms, persons) and therefore deterritorializes the former 'territorialized' complex of built structure and discursive formations. (Brunner, 2011: 148)

The obstacles along the Parkour route are not something simply to get beyond or over; they are a means of unfolding the potential for a different movement to take place. As we saw in Figures 4.2 and 4.3, these are landing sites, but 'fragile' ones. Gins and Arakawa delve into the emergence of a 'person architectonics' through the shifting processes of landing sites. The body is always in a certain way territorial, as it keeps a certain form, but at the same time it is the product of continuously intersecting and dissolving landing sites. A landing site is part and parcel of an actual percept in relation to its environment and at the same time the force of deterritorialization, which opens toward affects and their virtual potential. In other words, if one defines Parkour as a process of landing on different sites to compose larger sites, such as the body, one has to regard the affective force that hides in the material ground.

## Conclusion

It has been clear in this discussion that Parkour and photography do not correspond to discrete categories of, on the one hand, the 'represented' and, on the other, its 'technology of representation'. Photography stills the movement of the *traceur*, but it frames, constructs an out-of-frame, angles the shot, stages action in the urban décor, depicts and shapes bodies, and in so doing participates in, and prolongs, the practice of Parkour, which is fundamentally also about looking anew at the cityscape. Moreover, photography also probes the components of the act of Parkour, and in so doing gestures towards new perceptions and temporalities which the practice of Parkour announces. These temporalities articulate a relationship of flow and interruption that is interdependent and multilateral, for Parkour's construction of flow through regulated cityscapes is dependent on its own, alternative rhythms of motion and of rest even as their 'resistant' status remains open and intangible. The cognitive and perceptual intentionality of Parkour, as well as its reliance on the aleatory, on contact with different material substances and on potentiality and virtuality, are matched by the photographer's art, hunting the 'decisive moment' but also caught in patterns of light and time that surpass

it. In this way, an image with which to end may not be one of Parkour at all, but that of Henri Cartier-Bresson's 'Behind the Gare Saint-Lazare' (1932), in which so many facets come together: the mid-air leap, the urban landscape, the out-of-frame, the spatial real and chronological time but also the virtual with its mystery, its absence of logical progression, its combination of fluidity and arrest. The flying *traceur* framed against a backdrop of official, commercial city-centre buildings, and the anonymous passages linking them, is today contributing to a new aesthetics of the city which defamiliarizes by reawakening past histories and suggesting new futures, as well as new pathways.





# 5

## Commuting and the Multiple Capacities of Stillness

David Bissell

At twenty-five past five in the afternoon Parramatta Road, the main artery that heads west out of central Sydney, resembles a car park once again. The heat of the summer sun, still high in the sky, continues to beat down relentlessly onto the line-up of cars below. The outlines of the warehouses in the distance that flank much of this road as it cuts through Sydney's inner west blur in the haze of this airless bitumen furnace. The shiny tyre tracks on the road's surface, cross-cut with tiny canyons, bears witness to this scene of intense heat, weight and volume. The traffic lights are green. But as the illuminated brake lights attest, it is a scene that remains brutally still, as the cars in the foreground grind to another predictable stop. Whilst each of the individual air-conditioned spheres creates a temperate haven for withstanding this brutality, there is a palpable air of frustration. Glimpsed through glare-proof windows are tightly pursed lips, hands pressed against sunken faces, heads thrown back and hands avidly fidgeting.

For a city where two-thirds of people drive by car to and from work, this is a scene that is repeated across the city at this time of day as city workers leave work and attempt to make their journey home. Parramatta Road, Pennant Hills Road, Military Road, Victoria Road: these are road names that have become synonymous with the scourge of commuting stillness. Responding to the pressures put on transport infrastructures by a rapidly growing population in Western Sydney, the president of the Western Sydney Regional Organization of Councils recently declared that, in the absence of infrastructural



5.1 Parramatta Road, Camperdown, 5.25pm, 29 November 2012. Photo by David Bissell.

investment, ‘these people will literally not be able to move’ (WSROC, 2011). For many Sydneysiders, however, stillness is less an imminent possibility and more a crushing actuality of travelling to and from work every day in the city. Raising this issue to national prominence, in a speech on 30 January 2013 announcing the upcoming federal election, Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard singled out the pressures induced by commuting as one of the significant issues facing by the nation (Farr and Benson, 2013).

The scourge of stillness has typically been evaluated in terms of the economic threat of congestion, where it is understood in terms of lost productivity, calculated and expressed as a financial metric (Calfée and

Winston, 1998). Current estimations, for example, put the lost productivity owing to congestion in Sydney at ~~A\$4.8bn~~, potentially rising to ~~A\$8bn~~ by 2020 (*Financial Review*, 2011). Within this frame, commuting stillness becomes understood predominantly through the economic necessity for efficient, onward movement. However, this economic focus leaves out key questions about how commuting stillness affects urban life in many other ways. This chapter pushes beyond the economic evaluations of stillness by examining what stillness has the capacity to do to the commute: what it generates and what it opens up. It is based on a larger project that is looking at how increasingly stressful commutes are changing life in Sydney. In contrast to the overwhelming majority of research on commuting that has analysed it in terms of patterns and quantitative models, this project is looking at what the painful affects that are generated by the commute actually do to urban inhabitants and the constitution of life in the city.

For a collective movement so integral to urban life, the commute as a specific form of urban mobility has received surprisingly little attention from scholars looking at it from a socio-cultural perspective.<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that urban transportation has been absent from socio-cultural analysis. A rich seam of writing on urban mobilities has examined the relationships between architectures, infrastructures and movement, concentrating particularly on how the conception and construction of many major transport infrastructures have been designed to give rise to specific kinaesthetic experiences of moving across the city. Epitomized by the circulatory ideologies embedded within Haussmann's Parisian boulevards and Vienna's Ringstraße (Spring, 2006), many key transport infrastructures of the modernist metropolis are saturated by rationalist discourses of efficient movement, manifested in forms such as the elevated highway (Robertson, 2007) and the ring road (Hubbard and Lilley, 2004). Echoing the Italian Futurist imaginations of the city, and refracted through Paul Virilio's striking dromological writings on modernity (1986), many of Sydney's major arterial roads that feed the central business district such as the Bradfield Highway, the Cahill Expressway and the Western Distributor reflect precisely these ideologies of unfettered movement. Understanding cities as being constituted through their multiple mobilities is now a familiar mode of analysis in contemporary urban studies. Resonating with Manuel Castells's writing on 'space of flows' (1992) as a networked organizational logic and Zygmunt Bauman's writings on 'liquidity' (2000) as both metaphor and diagnosis of the experience of late modernity, David Harvey describes how cities are composed of 'flows of energy, water, food,

commodities, money, people and all the other necessities that sustain life' (Harvey, 2003: 34). These mobilities are supplemented with other more ephemeral but no less significant affective materialities that sustain the urban metabolism, often described through tropes such as 'energy', 'buzz' and 'momentum'.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, as geographer Nigel Thrift points out, to describe a world 'in which friction has been lost and everyday life skids along on the plane of velocity' (Thrift, 2008: 63) is to overlook the tensile character of these mobilities which are as much characterized by stillness as they are by movement (Bissel and Fuller, 2011). Indeed it is precisely these torsions of mobility and immobility that mobilities research employ as a powerful analytical device for examining contemporary social challenges (Urry, 2003). As a way of thinking about the emergence of new forms of inequality that are taking shape, it is a mode of analysis that is attentive to the politics of mobility, where the mobility of some is contingent on the immobility of others.<sup>3</sup> This torsion of mobility and immobility also invites us to think about the different degrees of coercion or voluntarism that characterize different mobilities.<sup>4</sup> Spotlighting the differentiated and variegated nature of mobilities prompts analysis of the initiation of, control of and access to mobility, revealing uneven but changing topologies of power. Developing these analytical tools in site-specific contexts, it is the productive and symbiotic tensions between movement and stillness that sustain key mobility hubs such as airports, for example (Adey, 2006).

Noting that immobility and stillness are part of the constitution of everyday life in the city, this chapter shows how the stillness of commuting is much more complex and ambiguous than simply a reduction to an economic threat.<sup>5</sup> The aims of this chapter are firstly to unpack commuting stillness in a way that reveals *multiple forms of stillness*; and, secondly, to discuss the multiple *capacities* of stillness. To achieve this, the chapter outlines four different ways of understanding the capacities of stillness in relation to commuting: as attritive; as protocological; as transparent; and as volatile. With the assistance of ethnographic fieldwork in Sydney, each of these four articulations of stillness examines the formative capacities of stillness in terms of generating new attachments, new relations, new ways of feeling and thus new configurations of urban life. In doing so, this chapter moves away from more representational and discursive understandings of stillness towards a more affective, ontological investigation into its constitution.

## The Fieldsite

Prior to the global financial crisis that began in 2008, Sydney had enjoyed a decade and a half of relatively uninterrupted economic prosperity. The population growth associated with this prosperity has put Sydney's transport infrastructure under intense pressure. The Hills District in Sydney's north-west in particular has experienced a disproportionate amount of this pressure. It is an area of high population growth, spurred on by urban development strategies during the 1980s and 1990s that facilitated the growth of specialist business services in the area of hubs such as the Norwest Business Park (Fagan and Dowling, 2005). Transport pressures have been exacerbated by neoliberal governance paradigms that have seen reduced spending on major transport infrastructures (McGuirk and O'Neill, 2002). As such, suburbs in the Hills District such as Castle Hill remain poorly connected to other parts of the city by public transport and plans to help alleviate some of these pressures, such as the proposed 'North West Rail Link' which would connect the Hills District to the CBD, have progressed no further than plans and promises (Thomas, 2013). Car dependency is further exacerbated by the dispersed nature of employment in Sydney more generally, with around 60 per cent of the city's total employment being located outside established centres (Forster, 1999).

Preliminary analysis of ~~Internet~~ transport forums and blogs together with news articles confirmed that commutes from Castle Hill and surrounding suburbs to Sydney's CBD were indeed generating a significant amount of negative sentiment (Besser, 2008). I therefore chose Castle Hill as my base for the preliminary ethnographic part of the project. During late November 2012, I spent a week living in Castle Hill and commuted into the CBD each day during peak commuting hours. Previous to this fieldwork, my sole experience of commuting in Sydney was three months of commuting by bus between Bondi and Randwick in the eastern suburbs during the autumn of 2007. The aim of this first piece of fieldwork for the project was therefore to get a ~~first-hand~~ preliminary impression of some of the issues germane to commuting practices in an area reputed for its poor transport links. Castle Hill is about 35 kilometres (just under 22 miles) from Sydney's CBD, and a number of different buses link the two places, taking different routes. Over the course of the week I experienced a few different routes, sometimes using the more direct 'express' buses to the city that take just over an hour, and

on other days using buses that took a more circuitous route through other suburbs or centres, resulting in even longer journeys. My mobile phone has a word processor that is fairly easy to type quickly on using two thumbs. So during each commute I used my phone to make comprehensive 'site writing' notes, responding to the experiential textures of each journey. Each of the four sections of this paper draws out a different moment documented in the site writing during the week.

### **Attritive Stillness: Gladesville Bridge, Victoria Road**

We've come to a standstill yet again. This time on the Gladesville Bridge. I'm still sitting on the M52 bus heading into Sydney's CBD along Victoria Road. The glowing red digital clock at the front of the bus says 8.25. I boarded this bus near Parramatta at 7.30, which now seems an eternity ago. I feel exhausted, a feeling that seems reinforced by the large purple crescent moons suspended hammock-like under dull affectless grey eyes around me. At this point in the journey, the iconographic skyscrapers and Harbour Bridge have crept into view on the horizon, rippling out and lending depth and extension to a roadside landscape that has until now been occupied with close-up, low grey buildings and illuminated by signs for McDonalds, Oporto, Caltex, KFC and Subway. Low grey cloud is sitting over the city and a few spots of rain silently fall against the outside of the window. A mosquito that has been provocatively dancing on the glass lands next to me on the inside of the window before dancing off behind me. A mild sense of paranoia of the mosquito's intentions holds me before being subsumed by weariness. A RiverCat boat slides along the Parramatta River underneath the bridge whilst a white ibis flies overhead in the other direction. The bus is full of people that seem poised towards productivity. A scene of monochrome creaseless shirts tucked in and fully buttoned. The dry, cold air is thick with the competing aromas of cologne and perfume, contrasting with the stultifying, salty humidity outside this metal cocoon. Cars ahead of us begin to move. But moments later, red break lights glower back, forcing us to a standstill yet again.

In 2011, the New South Wales Auditor General's report on the state of peak hour traffic in Sydney revealed that at 23 km/h, Victoria Road is officially the slowest corridor into the city (Saulwick, 2012). The bumper-to-bumper stop-start movement induced by slow-creep traffic jams increasingly characterizes the time signature of this city each weekday morning and

evening. Intermittent red break lights through blue exhaust fumes force the breaks once more as this 'space of flows' is brought to another predictable standstill. This experience of sitting still in morning traffic on the way to work spotlights a disjuncture between the freedoms promised by technologies of transit and the constraints that are induced by congestion. This is a disjuncture that is in part discursive, given the imbrication particularly of automobility within ideologies that tether liberty to tropes of autonomy (Rajan, 2006). But this disjuncture also works through affective registers where stillness is apprehended by commuters in a much more visceral and bodily way as a resistance to the kinaesthetic promises of technologies of transit (Tomlinson, 2007). As the cars in the lanes to the right of the bus begin crawling again, the heaviness of being at a standstill is partially alleviated. I can feel my chest becoming a little less tight as the destination feels a little more proximate. The engine of the bus wearily cadences to a sharper key, but as soon as we've begun to move, it falls rapidly once again as it responds to another round of deceleration. At the same time, heartbeat quickens slightly, eyes dart to red digital clock whilst lungs slowly rise and fall in a sigh.

That ideologies of mobility in the contemporary city remain indebted to high modernist narratives of unfettered circulation are revealed in the corporeal tropes that are drawn on to describe this attritive form of urban stillness. The language of congestion, blockage and clogged arteries that is so often used to describe this form of stillness points to how the city's 'metabolism' is failing and in need of rehabilitation. This is not a stillness understood as a mode of tactical resistance to the insistent dromomania of contemporary life (de Certeau, 1984) but a malignant, threatening form of stillness that is wearing the city down. Within the context of still-pervasive accelerationist narratives, this is a stillness that troubles Le Corbusier's early twentieth-century vision of the city as an efficient machine. For Le Corbusier, the city should be a space of engineered spaces of flow, demonstrating a modernist rationality that privileges unfettered, continuous circulation. The stillness that punctuates the mobility of commuting thus transforms its character from Le Corbusier's ideal of snapped-to-grid efficient flow to the more wandering, disorderly rhythms that are characterized by the Situationist-inflected drift and *dérive*.

Backgrounded against these narratives, stillness can be apprehended as a symptom that is revelatory in two distinct senses. Firstly, stillness becomes revelatory of a failing city. More than being a snapshot of a singular moment, this stillness diagnoses a much broader trajectory of decline that demands



action. When IBM released a study indicating that Sydney drivers are the most stressed in Australia (IBM, 2011), experiencing more ‘pain’ than commuters in London or Los Angeles, this stillness exposes the city on a global stage, bringing into disrepute an urban brand so fêted during the millennium Olympics, a decade or so previously.<sup>6</sup> Here, stillness works through a logic of exposure, where atmospheres of imperfectability permeate the city, simultaneously radiating and repulsing. The stillness of this traffic jam stands as a powerful synecdoche through which to diagnose the failing well-being of the city, apprehended as a loss of momentum and a sign of foreboding. As Gillian Fuller points out: ‘if speed and movement are commodities, then delay is the control’ (Fuller, 2009: 71). The stillness of congestion spreads out, infecting and jeopardizing the affective atmospheres that sustain the city’s politico-economic beat. Underscoring precisely this point, concerns about the significance of this attritive stillness garnered incredible strength in the 2011 New South Wales state election where Barry O’Farrell, who went on to win the state premiership, made tackling transport congestion a key priority.

Secondly, this is a stillness that has the capacity to reveal investments and attachments. The agitation that I am experiencing in this queue is in part an indication of how the radically contingent political conditions of our present sculpt and discipline our desires, aspirations and drives. That this stillness is diagnosed as an aberration, generating so much negative sentiment, spotlights an urban subject who is tethered to a logic of purposive action, striving to maximize effective activity: getting things done. Where the stillness of congestion jeopardizes the productive capacities of urban subjects whose immersion within employment conditions is increasingly characterized by real precarity (Neilson and Rossiter, 2005), what we see is the capacity of neoliberal capitalism to modulate affect, where performance becomes both an operational imperative and technique of control (Murphie, 2011). Indeed it is possible that this increasingly pervasive condition of precarity coupled with time-scarcity has led to a revalorization of linear temporality (Lupton, 2002), producing a charged affective atmosphere of agitation where stop-start stillness on the Gladesville Bridge becomes stolen time.

Yet, as we sit on the Gladesville Bridge, I am also acutely aware that the pain that I am experiencing here is of a qualitatively different form to those who are sitting around me, many of whom must endure this every day. I do not have the same time restrictions pressing on me, and my intentions feel somewhat macabre given that I am undertaking this journey to actively seek out stillness. Indeed the atmosphere on the bus feels rather serene, reminding



me that I cannot simply expect to feel these more endemic forms of attrition. The attritive stillness of how people are worn down by the repetitious nature of the commute simply does not reveal itself phenomenologically.

However, this form of stillness is significant given that it is different to the types of attrition that have received most attention by urban scholars. Research on the attrition and wearing-down of urban inhabitants has often focused on the differential resilience of people to irruptive, time-framed events.<sup>7</sup> The effects of catastrophic events such as Hurricane Katrina, but also other hugely disruptive time-framed events such as the US electricity blackouts of 2003, demonstrate a stillness that has the capacity to modulate affect in many ways (Protevi, 2009: ~~163–183~~). The attritive stillness of congestion, on the other hand, has a much less irruptive quality, taking place over much more extended, endemic durations. Rather than posing an immediate threat to the sustenance of our everyday life, this endemic stillness might make simply getting through the day a challenge, where even anticipating the next round of stillness becomes exhausting. It is a trauma that works through repetition in incremental slow-creep ways, quietly becoming debilitating and sapping vitality over time. It is a stillness that depletes and wears away, where the present becomes an obstacle to thriving (Berlant, 2011).<sup>8</sup> As such, attritive stillness stretches out beyond the time of the present, inhabiting the temporalities of the endemic whilst, at the same time, recasting desire and aspiration in equally slow-creep ways.

### Protocological Stillness: QVB, George Street

At twenty-five past five in the afternoon, Sydney's commercial heart is buzzing with the din of vehicles and the movement of people. On both sides of George Street, pavements are alive with city workers spilling out of the tall grey office towers that compose this space; their swift and purposeful gait and dark-suited attire marking them out from the slower eddies of more colourfully-clad tourists caught up in the scene. A dazzling summer sun slices through the streets that intersect George Street as the shadows of the skyscrapers create a softer cushion from this glare. With the temperature pushing 30 degrees, the late afternoon air is warm and fuggy, and the smell of traffic fumes combines with the sweeter smell of the sea: a reminder of the presence of the harbour at the far end of the street. Yet through this buzz and movement protrudes another form of stillness. I am standing still in a queue of about 50 people that has formed in the middle of the pavement alongside the

Queen Victoria Building. As more people arrive to queue, they join the far end of the queue, in spite of its length. Mustard-coloured buses arrive every minute or so and as they do, people peel out of the queue and form a second queue next to the door of the bus, letting those who have been in the main queue for the longest time board first. As people peel away, I shuffle further along the main queue, and wait again. Eyes trained on the luminous yellow destination board on each bus, waiting for the 615X to return to Sydney's north-west.

To condemn stillness so swiftly by focusing only on its attritive capacities overlooks its imbrication within the very constitution of commuting mobilities. One of the key modes of analysis that has come to define mobilities research concerns how systems of mobility require parallel immobilities for them to work (Urry, 2003). From my stilled position in the queue, looking to the right along George Street, I can see a line of buses being held at traffic lights as Park Street and Druitt Street intersect. As their engines idle at the red lights, it becomes apparent that to permit the mobility of pedestrians across this intersection, momentary stillness is required. Indeed in order for these collective movements to take place, many parts of this scene need to be still. These things include the physical infrastructures associated with transportation systems, such as the brute materialities of bitumen pavements, road signage, lane markings and traffic lights, without which passage could not occur.

But stillness is not just a necessary quality of 'moored' matter. It is also a fundamental constituent of the organizational logistics of this system of mobility. Succinctly articulating this point, Fuller reminds us how stillness is part of the 'predictive and proscriptive logistics' (2009: 64) through which movements are sorted, and given priority. Stillness here performs a calibrative function that regulates what would otherwise be an overly-turbulent flow. There are many moments beading the commute that are punctuated by this form of stillness. We queue for the bus; we wait on station platforms; we halt at the motorway toll booth. Each of these moments is a powerful example of a 'store-forward' movement protocol (Fuller, 2009: 64) where certain forms of stillness are entirely necessary for onward movement to take place. As I quickly scan my timetable to see when the next 615X is, in case the five-thirty has already gone, I am reminded that this store-forward distribution protocol of mobility is revealed and reinforced through the organizational technics of timetables and itineraries, where the stillness of the time-stamp anchors and rivets urban flows. Stillness here works to synchronize flows by reducing

turbulence to maximize efficiency. The mutual imbrication of movement with stillness demonstrates that this is not a stillness that is opposed to or resists movement, but a stillness that is fully conscripted into the organizational logics that underpins urban mobilities, where ‘stillness and movement are synthesized into an operational unity’ (Fuller, 2009: 64).

But protocological stillness works in other ways too, evidenced in particular by the way that it is put to work through new, distributed biopolitical regimes of control that work to capture, to identify and to render legible things on the move. From my position in the queue I notice a sign on the side of a bus reminding passengers that surveillance cameras are in operation. Casting back to earlier in the week when I purchased my weekly season ticket, the purchasing data driven by the credit card transaction was immediately captured and circulated within track-and-trace databases, revealing the advance from site-specific panoptic to distributed digital methods of ubiquitous control that underpins this information society (Graham and Marvin, 2001). But stillness captures us in other ways, too, when we keep in mind the propensity of diverse forms of capital to exploit these forms of stilled moments: from the informal economies of windscreen washers at traffic lights, to JCDeceaux’s bus-stop advertising lightboxes (Harley, 2011) where stillness is evaluated in terms of impact and exposure. Whilst exemption from its logic is not possible – think here of how substituting helicopter travel for busing or driving around the city (Cwerner, 2006) merely substitutes one series of store-forward protocols for a different set – there is a differentiated politics to its effects. The key political question raised by mobility scholars of who moves fastest and furthest (Cresswell, 2010) might be differently expressed by an examination of who is held for the longest. Store-forward sequencing is far from politically neutral when we consider who is accorded priority within these protocols.<sup>9</sup>

Yet in spite of its politico-economic utility, this is also a stillness that is pacified. Its volatilities, its potentialities and capacities for anything other than (albeit differentiated) onward movement is discharged by a logic that conscripts it into a functional and operational unity with movement. The ways in which the volatilities of stillness are discharged are attested to in two ways. First, and rather more practically, stillness as duration is being minimized through the same technological developments that are intensifying the reach and control of movement. Numberplate recognition at road tolls linked to an account that replaces the need to stop and pay and contactless RFID smartcards are exemplary here in their capacity to not only reduce durations

of stillness within store-forward systems of mobility but at the same time to increase the stature and resolution of our ‘data doubles’ that can be targeted, intervened in and purchased (Lyon, 2003). To this inventory we might add other technologies that seek to minimize stillness, such as smart traffic light systems that monitor traffic conditions through specific algorithms that can manage flows most efficiently.

The second way that the volatilities of stillness are discharged is through the ubiquity of signs such as the traffic light (Tuan, 1978). Signs are more than just gates that permit or restrict onward movement. They are *indicators* that form part of the very protocological technics that organize and orient flows. Casting the net more widely across the commuting scene, the train timetable, the countdown clock at a pedestrian crossing and the real-time motorway information board showing estimated driving time to the next junction are all indicators that are designed to minimize the unpredictability of stillness. They disarm the unexpected surprise by contextualizing stillness within a trajectory of onward movement. Each of these indicators gives rise to a protocological stillness that is always poised towards movement and the promise of a destination. They discharge stillness through an ‘anticipated directionality’ (Fuller, 2009: 67) that is teeming only with the virtuality of the event-to-come (Bissel, 2007), lending a form of safety and comfort where waiting will predictably and inevitably give way to onward directional movement.

The ubiquity of this protocological stillness, the way that it is sutured into multiple aspects of the commute, gives rise to an urban subject who is not only conditioned by a background ‘expectation of commands’ (Canetti, 1984: 312), but is also disciplined by the sting of command, to use Elias Canetti’s phrase. Be still until you are told to go, but go too soon and there will be problems. Protocological stillness is therefore pacified by its incorporation into control logistics that orchestrate movement. Where an outside to these modes of control might be difficult to discern, stillness itself becomes subsumed by the drawing-out of movement: a functional pause that is required in order to sustain movement.

### Transparent Stillness: Military Road Junction, Bradfield Highway

I’m sat once again on the 615X bus towards Castle Hill towards the end of the week, picking up some speed along the Bradfield Highway, a vast six-lane concrete snake that slices through the North Sydney landscape. As we pass the

overhead junction to Military Road, I am struck with the mildly disquieting feeling that I didn't really register going over the Harbour Bridge, an event that at the start of the week I really looked forward to as part of the journey. A commute through such an iconic scene, looking out of a bus window on to the sublime vista of the glittering ultramarine harbour flecked with beige and green ferries, flanked by the brilliant white dazzle of the opera house and cool greens of the adjacent botanic gardens seemed like such an incongruous juxtaposition of the banal with the fantastic. I attribute some of my glazed consciousness to the exhaustion of the week. But this oversight reminded me how, even over such a short period of time, my receptivity to different stimuli is changing, giving rise to a different form of stillness. Whilst the nature of fieldwork demands the cultivation of particular attunements to phenomena, I realize that my notes are becoming less dense, less 'evental', at this point in the week.

For many, an 'uneventful' commute is a welcome treat, where events are understood as the things that threaten the commute, things to be avoided and mitigated against. Events might be things like the traffic jams, accidents, breakdowns and road closures that traffic reporters commentate on. But being cut-up in traffic, sworn at, tailgated and hassled by fellow commuters might also register as events that make the commute less bearable. Yet the uneventfulness of the commute contrasts with the way that some social theorists have described contemporary life as increasingly characterized by what Lisa Adkins calls 'event time'. This relates to broader transformations to the political economy of temporality where changes in the organization of working life towards more flexible working practices, and a blurring of the distinction between home and work life have meant that to think about temporality in terms of events makes more sense than traditional notions of chronological 'clock' time (Adkins, 2009). For Adkins, 'event time' is a way of grappling with the current transformations of the social field where social processes are better understood through a logic of emergence rather than continuity. Yet this 'process ontology' where 'motion and change are attributable to the differences between successive events, each with their own durations' (Fraser, 2006: 130) seems at odds with the stubbornly repetitive way that the commute might be lived. If anything, the commute is one sphere of everyday life where the blinking colon separator of clock time makes its presence felt with renewed vigour. Earlier in the day, whilst preparing to leave for the morning journey to the CBD at six fifty-five, it was with some slow panic that I suddenly noticed that after four days of commuting, the two

clocks that I had been relying on to leave the apartment in time for the bus were actually six minutes apart.

Through its repetitive nature, rather than a series of unfolding, transformative events, it might feel like the commute is a duration that is characterized by an absence of progression, as something that must be sustained every day, where each journey bleeds into the next. Reminding us that the trope of ‘inertia’ does not just allude to physical stillness, but also a continuation of the same, Ivor Southwood argues that rather than a shift in the nature of temporality to privilege the time of the event, contemporary shifts in labour relations have instead given rise to a cycle of what he calls ‘non-stop inertia’. This more mobile understanding of inertia refers to the ‘frenetic inactivity’ (Southwood, 2011: 11), and the ‘cycle of passivity’ that characterizes the present condition of insecurity, perpetuated by the precarity that describes this particular manifestation of post-Fordist labour. Apprehended within the context of this non-stop inertia, the commute becomes less a duration of transformation, and instead is part of a broader incapacity to change. This might be an epistemological problem where the perception of transformations is attenuated by our tendency to perceive regularities and consistencies at the expense of change, as Bergson points out.<sup>10</sup>

Conceptualising the commute as a form of mobility ‘without event’ echoes Erin Manning’s discussion of a different kind of movement that takes place in the absence of events. In drawing an important distinction between movement and ‘auto-activation’, Manning argues that ‘inertia is the property of a body by virtue of which it tends to persist in a state of rest or uniform motion unless it is acted upon by an external force’ (2009: 50). Her argument is based on a discussion of Oliver Sacks’s work with post-encephalitic patients who have an inability to activate a change in state. Whilst this empirical site might at first appear rather disparate to the daily commute, there are clear parallels with the smooth movement without punctuation or change in state ‘felt as a loss of differentiation of space or time’ (Manning, 2009: 50) that Manning describes. This is a stillness that is difficult to intercept and devoid of punctuation. What we witness here is repetition of the same, lacking the connections and retentions that are necessary to re-orientate life, to make things different. Southwood’s description of inertia in contemporary urban life reaches its apex in the unrelenting routines that compose everyday life; routines that can dull the capacity to perceive differently.

Key, however, to Manning’s account of inertia as ‘movement without event’ is the absence of habitual action. Since it is the productive and creative

force of habitual action that is required to activate the transduction from incipency to displacement, without this causal efficacy ‘there’s nowhere to go but still’ (Manning, 2009: 55). Reflecting on how the commute has felt easier for me over the course of the week, where actions increasingly take place below the threshold of consciousness, we might consider how the strengthening of habit might attenuate our receptivity and susceptibility to be affected, to be moved in ways that previously felt intense. For Francisco Varela, the familiarity that habit brings about induces a kind of transparency which comes with the attenuation of perception: ‘when there is no change in affective tone, things are transparent. You walk down the street without any sense of the fact that you are walking down the street’ (Varela, 2000: 15). The gradual familiarity that the daily commute brings echoes precisely this form of transparent stillness that both cocoons and contains.

Just beyond Military Road I do notice a helicopter flying low overhead and speculate that it might be a traffic helicopter commentating on the scene below of which I am part. Even though this is an event of sorts that has spiked my attention, it further reinforces how these forms of surveillance are designed to provide information to lessen the impact of events. Real-time service information and traffic updates serve to intensify transparent stillness, reminding us that the commute is increasingly part of an informatic ecology that proscribes striation and punctuation: where the cracks, caesuras and interstices caused by events are smoothed and sutured with the ergonomic power of ubiquitous mobile devices and technologies that increasingly render us prostheses to their logic. Within this transparent stillness there is no chance of getting lost or losing the plot.

### **Volatile Stillness: Terry’s Creek, Hills M2 Motorway**

It’s the final day of riding the 615X back to Castle Hill in the afternoon rush hour and we’re stuck in roadworks again on the Hills M2 Motorway, about halfway home in terms of distance. Today I boarded this bus near Central Station and an agonizingly slow crawl through the CBD along George Street means that I’ve been sitting in the same position for about an hour and a half now.

Frustratingly, and revealing my naivety, I chose to sit in the seat that has part of the wheel arch on the floor, meaning less space for legs and bags and I’m boxed in by a man idly thumbing through the free *MX* magazine. My feet are jammed in the small gap under the seat in front. I can’t feel them anymore



and so I gingerly ease my left out from under the seat and try and lift it slightly. As I do, an intense pain shoots through my thigh and my numb foot wakes into a shimmer of pins and needles. I put my hands either side of me on the seat and try and sit up straighter in the seat to alleviate the burning sensation, suddenly quite relieved that I haven't got to get off the bus imminently and attempt to walk along the gangway dragging a numb foot. I look around and am struck by how sitting or standing still on a bus isn't really being still at all. A few people are standing in the gangway. One guy is holding a book with his left hand and holding the overhead strap with his right hand. As the bus slowly accelerates I can feel how he has to redistribute his weight to his left foot which is positioned behind him to steady himself. At the same time, my neighbour shuffles in his seat and starts to rub his thumb against the side of his paper.

For all the stillness that the commute induces, this scene is a reminder that it is incredibly difficult to be physically still. In sitting still, we come to apprehend how stillness is actually brimming with intricate micro-movements. Manning writes that 'when the body is at rest, our powers of introspective proprioception experience a world of microscopic tremors, vibrations and pulsations happening within the body' (Manning, 2009: 17–18). This is where stillness becomes an intensity in and of itself. Glancing at other people on the bus, it becomes clear how the involuntary restlessness of fidgeting (Connor, 2010) is an expression of these still intensities where the still body is reconstituted over and over through a kaleidoscope of unwilled micro-postures where the body reassembles itself; balancing and reconstituting poise. Drawing attention to these stilled intensities, Kathleen Stewart says that still life is 'a static state filled with vibratory motion, or resonance, it is the intensity born when the urge to react, the progress of a narrative, or the stability of a category is momentarily suspended' (Stewart, 2006: 91). This is a more volatile form of stillness in that it is not on the way to anywhere specific. It has no productive role, and its effects are unpredictable.

As we come to a standstill once again, rather than fretting about not being able to walk off the bus, or about what to cook for tea, or whether I'll have enough time in the evening to fit everything in that I want to do, I try and focus on my body, remembering mindfulness techniques that I have learned. Here, focusing on these micro-movements of stillness is a key part of mindfulness meditation, where stillness constitutes an intensity in and of itself to bring about a different way of inhabiting the commute (Conradson, 2011). Suspension of the productivist demands that we allow to habitually



assemble our subjectivity – our desire to be in certain places at certain times to get things done – need not be understood as a heroically reactive refusal. Volatile stillness permits the emergence of quiet instabilities that might make getting through the day just a little bit happier. Where the commute is an urban mobility that is threaded with the utilitarian preoccupations of tasks and goals, the pursuit of the known through the comforts of coherence, the brief suspensions that volatile stillness gives rise to work to unblock and release. Rather than being a resistance or impediment, this volatile stillness opens up a space for the reorientation of life, where ‘what we experience are virtual forces recombining, microperceptions shifting’ (Manning, 2009: 45). As such, volatile stillness is not just evident in the moments of mindfulness practised when halted by roadworks, but it might open up at many other moments in which habits of recognition are confounded and new attachments are made.

Volatile stillness can transform the commute by weakening the material grips on the world that both support and chasten us. The mindfulness technique briefly practised waiting at the roadworks capitalizes on the capacity of volatile stillness to disperse eddies of unwelcome ruminative anxiety.<sup>11</sup> The capacities of volatile stillness can potentially eviscerate those attachments that have become an obstacle to our flourishing, helping instead to generate new receptivities and other attachments. For some, particularly for those who might enjoy getting caught up in the frenzy of the commuting scene, desiring stillness might seem too indulgent in its reduction of ecstatic intensities of traffic rage to a duller neutrality. But volatile stillness has its own intensities that open up other forms of experience. Gaston Bachelard powerfully alludes to such intensities, describing how, through stillness,

immensity is within ourselves. It is attached to a sort of expansion of being that life curbs and caution arrests, but which starts again when we are alone. *As soon as we become motionless, we are elsewhere*; we are daydreaming in a world that is immense. Indeed, immensity is the movement of motionless man [sic]. It is one of the dynamic characteristics of quiet daydreaming. (Bachelard, 1994: 184, emphasis added)

I look out of the window again and, rather than being consumed by not being able to get things done in the little evening that I have left, with some happiness I notice two grey and pink galah cockatoos who are preening each other with real care at the top of the roadside cutting, stopping intermittently to look down to the traffic jam below. Ivy is overhanging the sprayed

concrete, and a few metres along another large ivy growth springs from a single weak point at the base of the cutting, splaying up into a beautiful, intricate arboreal pattern. A flock of twittering rainbow lorikeets fly overhead landing on the eucalyptus that are gradually becoming silhouetted against a purple-blue sky.

We could describe this volatile stillness as expansive, centrifugal even, in the way that it ripples out and opens up rather than closes down. In doing so, it weakens those attachments that might have become paralytically obdurate. But it might not come easily (Conradson, 2011). Indeed, meditation might be most expansive when it commandeers the same logic of repetition that it seeks to disrupt: a practice that takes time. Think here of how meditation garners the transformative capacities of habit as a force of slow-creep, incremental transformation; intensively working to sculpt the body anew, fostering dispositions and anticipations and generating futures (Ravaisson, 2008). In doing so, volatile stillness is an opening that *transcends and overflows the time of the present*. It is a stillness that stretches out, gathering pasts to condition futures. It enables new modes of attention to the passage of time. But, in doing so, it also spotlights the anonymity of attention: a life is attending, that is not ‘owned’ or directed by a sovereign ‘will’. Volatile stillness ‘makes appear’, or to draw on John-David Dewsbury’s description, it is a strange incomprehension that brings the existent into being (Dewsbury, 2011). A being *without* presence and without manifestation, or, to use Manning’s words, a hesitation ‘where we perceive the fluid force of the world’s becoming’ (Manning, 2009: 111).

## Conclusion

At the end of my first week of fieldwork, I sit on the balcony of my apartment overlooking Windsor Road. During peak commuting hours this is one of the busiest commuter conduits through the Hills Shire, linking Rouse Hill with Castle Hill and Baulkham Hills on its way to the Hills M2 Motorway which leads to the CBD. But now, at nine in the evening, a calmer form of stillness descends. Eucalyptus leaves gently rustle in the warm evening breeze, having lost their green and brown tones as the sunlight vanishes and sodium streetlights take over. A car whooshes along the road every now and then, creating a reassuring Doppler effect. A plane flies high overhead, its elevation providing a sense of how far away I am from Sydney’s CBD. As I watch the plane trace its quiet ascent above the Blue Mountains to the west of Castle



5.2 Windsor Road, Castle Hill, 9:05pm, 30 November 2012. Photo by David Bissell.

Hill, I reflect on the peculiar temporalities that commuting gives rise to. I pick up my fieldwork diary and open to the first page.

How to do site writing on a phenomenon that is so fully contingent on the durations that compose it? If the painful aspects of commuting come about through temporalities of the endemic – over weeks, years, lifetimes – it feels problematic that I enter this sphere fresh, primed only by the bricolage of academic articles and caricatured media reports that I have read, together with friends' and colleagues' anecdotal remarks about their frustrated itineraries through Sydney. Will I only be able to grasp this phenomenon conceptually, rather than affectively? What will this strange emulation do?

This is the first passage that I wrote in my fieldwork diary when I arrived at my apartment for the week, a day before my first commute, anticipating the short fieldwork temporal arc that was to unfold. After five days of commuting to and from Castle Hill to Sydney's CBD, I do feel somewhat transformed by the experience, although in quite vague ways that do not lend themselves well to articulation. Setting the alarm to wake up at ten to six in the morning felt entirely foreign (I might admit even a little exciting) at the start of the week (I afforded myself one push of the snooze button). For the first two mornings, preparing to leave the apartment was quite a difficult task. I had to force myself to think about what I needed to do and when to do it. By the end of the week, I had already found a rhythm and things came a bit more habitually. But the excitement of the commute was wearing off. I started to get a sense

of how doing this every day for extended durations would recompose bodily capacities in new and unexpected ways that were not phenomenologically available to this sort of ethnographic site writing. These were effects that I could only speculate on based on my limited experience and the words of others. This first foray into Sydney's commuting scene has only just begun to open up some of the complex affective topologies of everyday travel in the city; what it does reveal is how inertia and stillness needs to be apprehended in terms of its multiplicity.

Analysing my fieldwork observations and threading them through conceptual frames of reference, in this chapter I have argued that we need to be more attentive to the *multiple* stillnesses that punctuate commuting mobilities. Attritive, protocological, transparent and volatile stillnesses demonstrate how *different stillnesses have powerful capacities in and of themselves*. In the context of the commute, these are stillnesses that are not necessarily conscripted into a subordinate and residual relation to more productivist understandings of movement, or adjudicated according to a moral schema of indolence or negativity. Rather, these qualitatively different forms of stillness have the capacity to re-draw relations, scramble attachments, sculpt desires and assemble futures in different ways. Multiple stillnesses have formative powers working together in different configurations to shape commuting life. Where certain forms of stillness expose the body, leaving it vulnerable to be affected by all kinds of phenomena, other forms of stillness close and cocoon, hardening the body and rendering it less susceptible to other impelling ideas. Stillness is thus one of the most fertile and fascinating tropes through which to understand the changing politico-ethical topologies of mobile life in the city.

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## Notes

- 1 With a few notable exceptions such as Edensor (2010a).
- 2 See, for example, Amin and Thrift (2002).

- 3 See in particular Graham and Marvin (2001), Adey (2006) and Massey (1993).
- 4 For striking examples, see Martin (2011) and Jeffrey (2008).
- 5 See also Bissell and Fuller (2011).
- 6 For a discussion on urban branding, see in particular McNeill, Dowling and Fagan (2005).
- 7 See the chapters in Graham (2009) for powerful examples.
- 8 Making this point a little more colloquially, the New South Wales Auditor General Peter Achterstraat described the drive to work in Sydney as being like ‘15 rounds with Muhammad Ali’ (Saulwick, 2011).
- 9 For powerful examples see Graham (2005).
- 10 ‘Repetition is . . . only possible in the abstract: what is repeated is some aspect that our senses, and especially our intellect have singled out from reality, just because our action, upon which all the effort of our intellect is directed, can move only among repetitions. Thus, concentrated on that which repeats, solely preoccupied in welding the same to the same, intellect turns away from the vision of time. It dislikes what is fluid, and solidifies everything it touches.’ (Bergson, 1944: ~~52–53~~)
- 11 For a discussion of the dynamics of ruminative obsession, see Bissell (2012).



# Part 2

## Deceleration





# 6

## Decelerating Amsterdam: Visual Culture, Globalization and Creative Urbanism

Christoph Lindner and Miriam Meissner

### Global Amsterdam

This chapter is about art, globalization and cities. Addressing these concerns in relation to street photography and urban renewal initiatives in the city of Amsterdam, our broad aim is to examine slowness as a condition in contemporary urban life, articulated and operationalized in visual cultural and spatial practice. In particular, we explore what happens when photography strategically decelerates, disrupts, re-routes, or even stops movement, flow, and interaction in the global city in order to refocus attention on issues of place, community and belonging. We argue that these interruptive practices connect, in the examples that follow, to a contemporary trend within cultural activism – the so-called ‘slow movement’ – which emphasizes slowness as a strategy for confronting globalization, neoliberalism and the associated accelerations of everyday life, transport, communication and economic exchange.

The slow movement can be understood as a strategic reaction to today’s ‘culture of speed’ (Tomlinson, 2007), which finds its most extreme expression in contemporary global cities. The philosopher Paul Virilio has given a largely pessimistic account of the interrelation between speed and cities, arguing that the emergence of technological ‘speed-space’ ultimately destabilizes the city as ‘a territorial localization, and also as a place of an assumed right, affirmed by

policy' (Virilio, 2001: 80–1). Accordingly, cities as locations of community and political interaction 'are undone by technology, undone by television, defeated by automobility', resulting in a fragmented, de-politicized 'society of the non-place' (Virilio, 2001: 81).

By analysing a selection of street photography projects that were all realized in the city of Amsterdam in 2012 as part of urban renewal initiatives, we argue that the interrelation between speed, cities, society and politics is more complex than alarmist accounts such as Virilio's recognize. In particular, the chapter provides a case study of urban visual practices that strategically employ slowness as a means of creating (and reflecting on) modes of citizenship under the current 'global-urban condition' (McCann and Ward, 2011). Instead of interpreting these photography projects as being solely a form of resistance against the lived experience of gentrification and social fragmentation in the accelerated city, we also show how slow art can simultaneously become complicit with neoliberal globalization and the imperatives of contemporary urban development.

Drawing on Jamie Peck's (2011) work on the creative city as a portable paradigm of city profiling and global intercity competition, our discussion offers a critical account of how creativity and slowness have become increasingly popular, exploitable and intertwining ideals of a cosmopolitan citizenship. In addition, our specific focus on urban photography – on slow *visual* art – makes it possible to examine how strategies of halting, delaying and diverting the flows of the global city actually engage with both the aesthetics and the semiotics of visual montage, zooming, distortion and reflection. The intertwining of urban rhythms and modes of perception is therefore crucial to our understanding of slowness as a strategy of creative interruption within the global city.

This understanding of slow art as a form of intervention in the multiple rhythms of urban everyday life draws on Henri Lefebvre's method of 'rhythmanalysis' (2004) which, as Tim Edensor explains in his reappraisal of Lefebvre, offers 'an exemplary method through which to mediate between overdrawn, static reifications of place [and] hyperbolic accounts about spaces of flows' (Edensor, 2010b: 18). Approaching the city as a complex 'ensemble of normative rhythms and counter rhythms' (Edensor, 2010b: 4) allows us to analyse slow art's strategic engagement with the polyrhythmic mobilities of the global city, produced via the interplay of urban architectures, bodies and technologies, municipal regulations and economic production and exchange,

as well as urban inhabitants' efforts to play with or subvert such city-rhythms. These multiple dimensions of urban rhythm analysis inform our reading of urban space and creative practice in Amsterdam.

Alongside more prominent cities such as New York, London and Tokyo, which have long attracted sustained critical attention in globalization studies dating back to Saskia Sassen's *The Global City* (1991), Amsterdam is a key location for studying urban culture, practice and policy in the era of globalization. The city has a long, deep history of transnational exchange dating back to the Dutch Golden Age. More recently, Amsterdam has become a site of growing tension between efforts to sustain cultural heritage and efforts to develop the city's global potential as a financial/cultural hub in the style of London or Paris (Lindner, 2013). This has resulted in a double identity for Amsterdam – in mainstream urban branding terms – as both a 'heritage city' nostalgically rooted in the past and a 'global city' aggressively oriented towards the future (Nijman, 1999). Since the countercultural turn of the 1960s, Amsterdam has also emerged as a hotspot of urban creativity, social experiment and spatial reordering. Add to this Amsterdam's 'other' identities as a post-colonial city of exclusion and, of course, as a 'sin city' (home to the world's most iconic red-light district) and it is clear that many of the core components of urban citizenship – such as place, community and belonging – are in rapid flux.

It is against this backdrop that we want to examine the interplay of photography and urban renewal. Our focus is on two very different but interrelating forms of creative intervention in public urban space: the first is construction sites and the second is community art. To explain how and why we connect one to the other, we proceed to situate the two spaces/practices in relation to Amsterdam's current municipal creativity policies. We then address our conceptualization and use of the term 'slow art', which builds on existing research on public art as a potential 'bridge gentrifier' (Zukin, 1995, qtd. in Mathews, 2010: 672), promoted to attract investment and aesthetically frame urban change (Mathews, 2010; Miles, 1997).

First, however, we need to explain that, in this chapter, we understand construction sites as spaces of encounter within the global city, an idea which is imaginatively explored in the case studies we cite, where building work and artwork are deliberately conjoined. Our shift to community art later in the chapter is intended to problematize our findings about construction sites by contrasting them with street photography that foregrounds the global city

not as a site to be glossed over, homogenized, or flattened, but instead as a basis for reconstituting urban citizenship.

What our examples of construction sites and community art have in common is that they mark responses to the perceived inauthenticity of place in contemporary cities. This, however, is not to suggest that such interruptions of globalization are necessarily lasting, profound, or even productive. Rather, our argument is that urban slow art can register – however temporarily and often unintentionally – a tension within contemporary cities between movement and stasis, memory and futurity, continuity and change.

### Recreative City

In his 2011 article ‘Recreative City: Amsterdam, Vehicular Ideas and the Adaptive Spaces of Creativity Policy’, Jamie Peck presents a critical analysis of Amsterdam’s creativity policies over the last decade. Examining the enthusiastic engagement of Dutch urban planners with the creative turn in urban ~~policy-making~~ – a turn which he largely ascribes to Richard Florida’s ‘paradigm-making book’ *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002) (Peck, 2011: 463) – Peck criticizes the discursive deployment of the creative city idea as a political strategy to ‘celebrate culture and embrace growth at the same time’ (2011: 465). The notion of creativity hence becomes a vehicle – a ‘vehicular idea’ (McLennan, 2004) – of neoliberal urbanism, appropriating urban creative culture as an exploitable selling point within the broader global city competition for status and capital.

Enthusiastically embracing Florida’s ‘three T’ guideline of technology, talent, and tolerance for successful urban development (Florida, 2005), the city of Amsterdam has launched a series of policies that are meant to attract art, design and media professionals as well as facilitate creative self-employment. For instance, Amsterdam has taken up ideas that originate from its squatting movement to make work spaces available for creative professionals. Known as the ‘breeding places’ (*broedplaatsen*) project, this policy involves arranging and subsidizing atelier rooms in abandoned and under-utilized real estate, encouraging creative professionals to ‘occupy’ those spaces and develop projects which have the potential to become profitable in the future (Figure 6.1). Yet the problem that Peck identifies regarding the *broedplaatsen* policy is that, instead of changing the more structural problem of overpriced housing and unequal access to space, the project enables selected professionals to temporarily bypass the reality of Amsterdam’s real estate market. Avoiding



6.1 Kunststad (Art City) *broedplaats* at NDSM Wharf in Amsterdam-Noord, 2008. Photo by Akbar Simonse.

substantive political reforms and high financial commitments, the city can thus promote creativity without having to implement new social welfare policies.

Taking the *broedplaatsen* project as a controversial example of Amsterdam succumbing to the ‘Florida effect’ (Peck, 2011: 480), Peck’s more general critique of Amsterdam’s efforts to promote creative industry startups addresses what he calls the ‘domestication’ and economization of creativity according to the ‘political-economic conditions of neoliberalizing cities’ (Peck, 2011: 482). The centrally-managed incorporation of all cultural activity into the overarching business goal of strengthening Amsterdam’s image as an international ‘Top City’ (*Topstad*) transforms creativity into a new-economy booster. However, being caught up in the global market rules of competition, work flexibility, individual responsibility and urban competition for investment, this new economy actually ‘conforms... with the constraints of flex-labor markets, sociospatial polarization, endemic interurban competition, and gentrified housing markets’ (Peck 2011: 479). Therefore, creative capitals ‘exhibit higher rates of socioeconomic inequality than other cities’ (Peck, 2009: 8).

What is particularly relevant about Peck’s argument is that his critique of creative city policies ties in with a broader claim about the forms of mobility and urban citizenship that creativity policies generate:

Creative subjects are celebrated for their hypermobility and for their strictly circumscribed, individualistic commitments to place. These economic hipsters thrive in buzzing 24/7 neighborhoods, where they can satisfy their craving for 'heart-throbbingly real' experiences, but at the drop of a hat may chose to relocate to an even more happening place. (Peck, 2009: 6)

According to Peck, the creative economy's hypermobility brings about an increasing detachment from place and community. This goes hand in hand with the commodification of urban places, allowing mobile citizens to consume the feeling of place as an event – that is, as an experience of manufactured authenticity that comes without social bonds or responsibilities.

### Slow Art

It is against this background of the recreative city and its vehicularity that we examine examples of urban slow art: aesthetic interventions which emerge from, but also counter, the conditions of speed, mobility and invisibility (anonymity) that have become so ubiquitous in rapidly globalizing cities, while simultaneously connecting with the creative turn in urban policy-making. Urban slow art thus constitutes a field of tension between resistance against and promotion of the neoliberal transformation of urban space.

This ambivalent capacity to both resist and promote spatial inequalities in the city has also been linked to public art in general. Malcolm Miles, for instance, recognizes the potential of public art to act as a catalyst for political imagination and 'a reaction against the commoditization of art by its markets and institutions' (Miles, 1997: 4). Yet he also recognizes that, when incorporated into urban development, public art may also be used to 'distract attention from social issues' and become 'complicit in the consequent social fragmentation' (Miles, 1997: 64). In a similar vein, Vanessa Mathews claims that public art supports government officials, developers and private investors in 'framing urban change', and therefore constitutes 'a major component in a multifaceted strategy to alleviate the social ills characterizing contemporary urban spaces, including declining population rates, high unemployment, derelict and underused lands and buildings, and a waning sense of place' (Mathews, 2010: 667). Though Miles and Mathews disagree about public art's capacity to act as a 'place-maker' – Mathews viewing art as 'vital in the (re)construction of place identity' (Mathews, 2010: 672) and Miles questioning art's place-making potential, pointing to divergences in the reception of

art in public space (Miles, 1997: 9) – both highlight public art's deployment to aestheticize urban transformation.

This chapter builds on these insights but specifically focuses on public art practices that strategically engage with the paces/temporalities of spatial transformation and social interaction in the global city. We use the term 'slow art' because of the connection it suggests to the various slow movements that have sprung up in cities worldwide, beginning most notably with the slow food movement, but also extending to other, more recent slow practices such as urban farming, urban knitting and guerilla gardening. To these, we could add an entire list of interrelating spin-off movements, including slow money, slow travel, slow fashion, slow design, slow parenting, slow media and slow science.

What these various slow movements have in common is a politically-motivated desire to resist the accelerated pace of contemporary life in order to promote values and concepts such as community, sustainability, justice, roots, quality and belonging. Yet, as Wendy Parkins points out in an article on the ethics and goals of the slow movement:

'slow living' is not a slow-motion version of postmodern life; nor does it offer a parallel temporality for slow subjects to inhabit in isolation from the rest of the culture. Slow living involves the conscious negotiation of the different temporalities which make up our everyday lives, deriving from a commitment to occupy time more attentively. (Parkins, 2004: 363)

As a form of activism, therefore, slowness does not refer to a single mode of temporality but rather describes the versatile strategies of consciously dealing with the mobilities of the early twenty-first century. Slowness may thus be thought of in the plural – as manifold 'slownesses' – just as it has become common to speak of mobility as 'mobilities' in contemporary critical theory (Urry, 2007).

On the one hand, this renewed understanding of mobility has occurred partly in response to the way globalization's time-space compression exerts a 'power geometry' (Massey, 1991: 25), distinguishing between those mobilities that are chosen and those that are enforced, as well as acknowledging the fact that the mobility of certain world-citizens can cause or necessitate the immobility of others. On the other hand, the recognition of mobility as a plurality results from an increasing amount of scholarship that has been devoted to researching the concrete assemblages of actors, technologies and



protocols that compose different forms of mobility (Cresswell and Merriman, 2011).

It is similarly important to recognize that there are diverse forms of slowness, differing in terms of quality, experience and intention. Whether slowness implies intensity of boredom, interruption, or prolongation, an effect of (or resistance against) movement and acceleration depends on the various contexts and techniques by means of which slowness is realized. As David Bissel and Gillian Fuller point out in their work on the related concept of stillness:

Stillness might emerge through other configurations of matter, which are not necessarily reducible to the dialectic of mobility and immobility. What happens if we think stillness not only as rhythm, but also as technic or trope? As attunement or perception? As interruption or ingress? Breaking with this impulse to understand still as always a relation of movement will help to illuminate the multiplicity of ontological and epistemological registers through which still moves. (2011: 6)

Adapting Bissel and Fuller's thinking on stillness, our analysis of photographic slow art is centred on precisely the idea that slowness has different modalities.

Similar to the various slow movements described above, the urban slow art we discuss next shares an emphasis on the deceleration and even stoppage of urban mobilities. Nonetheless, it differs in at least three important ways. First, rather than being produced under conditions of slowness (like slow food) or outside and against the spatial regulations of the city (like guerilla gardening or urban knitting), the slow art of construction and community is produced under conditions of speed and movement and – crucially – within authorized city-marketing and urban development strategies. This kind of aestheticizing of urban change and public space therefore operates within a highly regulated environment, even if that environment is characterized by transience and transformation. In this sense, our examples of slow art are deeply implicated in the global urban spectacle of speed and flash, even if they are also frequently critical of or indirectly resistant towards that spectacle.

The second important difference is that the slow art of construction lacks the political motivation and grassroots organization driving other slow movements, even though the art itself often has strong community ties and fixed geo-historical coordinates. In other words, this is not a conscious or



coordinated movement in any explicit sense, but instead an uneven symptomatic response to urban life under the accelerated conditions of globalization. This situation, however, becomes more complicated when applied to the slow art of community, but that is a point we address later on.

Perhaps the most significant difference, however, is that most of the slow art we discuss is not necessarily designed to be about slowness at all, or even connected to globalization and mobility. In this sense, the art is only accidentally, incidentally, or superficially slow, a slowness of affect and appearance only. It is this ambivalent articulation of slowness, we argue, that makes these particular iterations of street photography so productive to study in relation to globalization and urban creativity.

## Construction Sites

Construction sites stand out as spaces of rapid transformation and reordering where contemporary discourses surrounding urban planning (such as those of the smart city, the sustainable city and the creative city) find both material and symbolic expression, and where a broader spatial dynamic of resistance and regeneration can be played out in public view. It is therefore of particular interest to consider what role construction sites can play in simultaneously slowing down and speeding up urban flows, ranging from the circulation of people, traffic, capital and data to the movement of ideas, values, images and styles.

In the city of Amsterdam, archival urban photography from the late nineteenth century, as well as contemporary photo projects, are being deployed in large-scale formats by artists, developers and city planners in coordinated efforts to screen urban change and produce nostalgic and idealized images of urban stasis – all set against the backdrop of the amnesiac, accelerated urbanism of globalization. As Anne Cronin points out in her study of advertising billboards in the UK, such efforts to shape public perceptions of urban change frequently occur around sites of demolition and rebuilding:

As part of the everyday urban environment, billboards and panels articulate certain temporalities and spatialities, and help shape people's sense of engagement with these changes... It is clear that billboards, wraps and panels tap into and shape the temporalities that are produced both by the dereliction and ruination of old buildings, and by sites as they are being demolished or regenerated. (Cronin, 2010: 130)



6.2 'Piet Hein' construction site, Amsterdam, 2012. Photo by Miriam Meissner.

Similar to the British advertising billboards that Cronin analyses, the artworks installed around construction sites in Amsterdam interfere with the ways in which the public experiences and interprets the city's socio-spatial development in time. Here, the aestheticization of urban change transforms these sites into something we might call temporary 'places' in the fully loaded sense of the word: contingent sites of focalized meaning produced, in these instances, by the interplay of memory, visibility and urban change.

Figure 6.2, for instance, shows nineteenth-century photographs, sourced from the collections of the Amsterdam City Archives, being used to decorate the 'Piet Hein' construction site in the popular Kinkerbuurt area in the west of the city, where a new apartment complex is being built. Passers-by see a poster overhanging the construction site. It displays a digitally-produced simulation of the apartment complex, illustrating the street corner's appearance once the building is finished. In sharp contrast, large prints of black-and-white photographs – installed at the border between street and construction site – show the old appearance of the neighbourhood in the 1890s (Figure 6.3). Reminiscent of a display in a shop window, the nostalgic installation invites passers-by to slow down and look at the photographs.



6.3 'Piet Hein' construction site: archival photograph of the Kinkerstraat. Photo by Miriam Meissner.

The desired effect of this invitation to slow down and look is that of time travel, creating an historical sense of place by visually relating the site's present and future to a nostalgic, decolourized memory of its absent past. Yet this photographic mural is about more than just creating an imaginary timeline of the neighbourhood's social and architectural development throughout the last century. As decorative blinds, the photographs also hide the current renewal of this neighbourhood, using place nostalgia as a means of concealing and distracting from urban change, including in this instance the associated gentrification and architectural homogenization that is not only symbolized but actualized by the new apartment complex.

This dynamic of effacement and distraction is also evident in another street photography project realized at the same time in 2012 at Haarlemmerplein, a central square near Amsterdam's historic city centre. In this case, the building under construction is designed to accommodate not just apartments but also shops and an underground parking garage. As the website of the project's construction company explains:

Heijmans has begun execution of the Haarlemmerplein project in the centre of Amsterdam. This inner-city area is being developed by Heijmans Vastgoed (property) in collaboration with the Amsterdam municipality. Haarlemmerplein has remained undeveloped for some 30 years, with the project intended to reinterpret its use. The project's expected yield is around €25 million.

The plan comprises 47 owner-occupied apartments, 22 rental apartments, 1,200 m<sup>2</sup> of shop space and a 3.5-level underground parking garage with around 200 bays. The rental residences have been sold to De Key housing association, while the section of the garage containing public parking bays will be delivered to Parkeergebouwen Amsterdam. The building was designed by Dick van Gameren of the Architectengroep. Construction is expected to last some three years. (Heijmans, 2006)

As this public statement makes clear by including an estimation of the building project's expected yield, the urban renewal taking place at Haarlemmerplein is above all economically motivated, and is consistent with the neoliberal approach of developing new property for real estate investment and aggressively tapping urban public space for commercial usage.

Interestingly – but not accidentally – the artistic project that surrounds and decorates the Haarlemmerplein construction site deals with a completely different subject than that of the new building complex. Funded by the city of Amsterdam and installed by the construction company, the project consists of a series of photographs by local artist Jan Theurn van Rees that, as the informational sign accompanying the installation explains,

...connects different interiors of the surrounding homes and businesses in unexpected/surprising combinations. Moving from photo to photo will take you on a voyage of discovery through strange, striking, and sometimes hidden places on the Haarlemmerplein.

Focusing on intimate domestic details within the photographed homes, the project employs close-ups and an aesthetic emphasis on vivid colour to produce an almost surreal impression of the different domestic details, rooms and spaces displayed (Figures 6.4 and 6.5).

As the project's description outlines, viewers are invited to undertake an urban discovery tour, newly familiarizing themselves with the hidden, private spaces of the neighbourhood while simultaneously fulfilling the quasi-touristic, adventurous desire of experiencing unknown places and sensations.

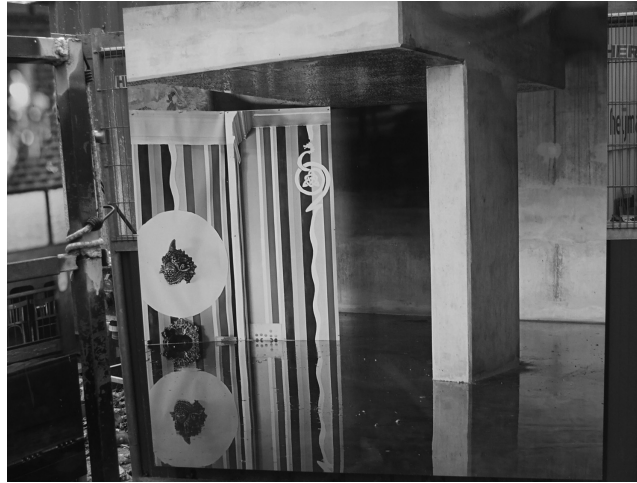




6.4 Haarlemmerplein construction site and photography project, 2012. Photo by Miriam Meissner.



6.5 Section of photo-mural at Harlemmerplein, 2012. Photo by Miriam Meissner.



6.6 Zoom delirium, Haarlemmerplein, 2012. Photo by Miriam Meissner.

The imaginary crossing of the boundary between urban public and private space generates a virtual nearness – an imaginary moment of acquaintance with the neighbourhood – which is almost immediately countered by the estranging aesthetics of zoom and colour that characterize the photographs (Figure 6.6).

In the case of the Haarlemmerplein construction site, slowness is achieved by means of photographic techniques and aesthetics that produce conflicting effects of familiarization and estrangement. What connects the Haarlemmerplein construction site photography with the nostalgic archival photographs of the Kinkerbuurt is that both projects create slowness not only by placing art in public spaces and thereby decelerating pedestrian and traffic flows through the demands placed on the attention of passers-by, but also and more significantly by distracting from urban architectural transformation and the larger spatial reordering of the global city to which that transformation belongs.

In both cases, slowness results from masking mobility. This effect follows from a strategy of redirecting visual attention, effectively exploiting the medium of photography's potential to create alternative imaginaries of place on the spot. While the Kinkerbuurt photographs simulate a time shift, evoking a dreamy nineteenth-century urban neighbourhood (including associations with slowness and social cohesion that are conjured up by this imaginary), the Haarlemmerplein project reroutes the attention of passers-by to the interior spaces of the surrounding neighbourhood. Both art projects employ

visual culture as a means of creatively cushioning the reality of rapid – and often highly generic – urban restructuring.

As these examples reveal, slow art at construction sites – ranging from gritty historical images of urban serenity to the design delirium of contemporary domestic interiors – is being deployed by developers, city councils, community organizations and often the artists themselves, to counter (while also contributing to) the accelerated flows of globalization. As such, these spaces are marked by aesthetic interruptions which at one level serve to decelerate the flows of the global city, yet at another level paradoxically form part of those flows.

To understand this dynamic more fully, it helps to turn to Ackbar Abbas and to recalibrate his concept of disappearance and the politics of place, developed in the 1990s in relation to post-colonial Hong Kong, in which, as he explains, ‘disappearance is not a matter of effacement but of replacement and substitution, where the perceived danger is re-contained through representations that are familiar and plausible’ (Abbas, 1997: 8). In the Amsterdam construction sites discussed here, a related form of disappearance can be identified, in the sense that there is similarly a dynamic of concealment, distortion and misrecognition at work in these transient city spaces. It is one that draws on, but also reframes, memory and a sense of neighbourhood in relation to the fast-paced developmental imperatives of the global city and the neoliberal now.

So although these urban construction sites work somewhat differently than the post-colonial sites of disappearance Abbas identifies in Hong Kong’s culture of speed and flash, they nonetheless emerge in a similar way as places of contradiction, contest and ambivalence. In the case of Amsterdam, these spaces of rapid transformation become sites for the negotiation of a tension running throughout the city: a tension between the desire to re-ground cultural heritage and the pressure to build an amnesiac global future. It is this tension that connects what is happening in Amsterdam to other rapidly globalizing cities worldwide, where the transformative effects of globalization, including the speed and scope of change, are recurring sources of both cultural energy and anxiety (Lindner, 2010).

What is especially notable about the Haarlemmerplein photography project is that, by combining an aesthetic of neighbourhood interiors with the voyeuristic promise to reveal strange sensations, the images cater to both a desire for homeliness and, simultaneously, curiosity for newness. Thus, the project combines the desire for place as familiar retreat with the marketing of

place as a form of spectacle. In this way, the project confirms Peck's thesis of the creative commodification of place as an event within the recreative city. What is more, in its presentation of place as something familiar yet unknown, the Haarlemmerplein project also shares a key characteristic with our next case study.

## Street View

Shifting the focus from construction space to community space, our final case study is a 2012 community art project called 'Street View'. Like the Piet-Hein construction site discussed above, it comes from Amsterdam's Kinkerbuurt neighborhood, a former working-class district dating back to the nineteenth century, which has been transformed in the last 50 years into a vibrant and highly multicultural neighbourhood, accommodating increasing numbers of immigrants from Morocco, Turkey, West Africa, Surinam, Indonesia and, in a recent wave of gentrification, young middle-class Dutch families and the expatriated elite of the global corporate diaspora.

In other words, the Kinkerbuurt is a highly cosmopolitan, economically diverse and transnational neighbourhood which is continually being transformed and reinvented, and where many of the trends and tensions of globalization – especially in relation to labour and migration – converge. At the same time, it is also a neighbourhood whose historical identity has long been in crisis and where local authorities have been struggling to accommodate the complex range of cultural ties and lifestyle choices of its inhabitants.

One response has seen the local city council fund a number of community art initiatives, with the aim of encouraging public discussion and interaction, as well as experimentation with creative ownership over public space. *Street View* is one such project. Organized by a local neighbourhood foundation – the Stichting Bellamybuurt – with support from Amsterdam West city council, the project temporarily transforms private household windows into showcases displaying works by students of the Amsterdam Photography Academy (Figure 6.7). What all of the exhibited works have in common is that they depict everyday scenes from cities around the world, including Consuegra (Spain), Leiden (The Netherlands), London (UK), Mechelen (The Netherlands), Naples (Italy), Nazca (Peru), New York (USA) and Rome (Italy). As this list reveals, not all of the selected cities rank amongst the largest, most popular, or even most recognizable global cities worldwide. Rather, the





**6.7** Street View: residential window showcases, Kinkerbuurt, 2012. Photo by Miriam Meissner.

locations reflect the eclectic and unpredictable urban connections that exist between the artists, their homelands and their sites of travel.

The residential window showcases are organized around a pre-planned route, which means that viewers are invited to use an associated map and walk through the neighborhood in order to find all 14 of the artworks belonging to the exhibition. The project's title – *Street View* – thus acquires a double meaning. It invites residents and visitors alike to look at a diverse set of global street photographs from other cities while simultaneously exploring the actual streets of Amsterdam's Kinkerbuurt neighborhood. This interrelation is strengthened by the fact that, in bright daylight, the showcases' window panes mirror the artworks' immediate environment (Figure 6.8). These ghostly reflections of Amsterdam streets, cars, buildings and people in the window panes reinforce the impression that the exhibition forms an extension of Amsterdam's everyday streetscape. What is more, such visual interferences further slow down viewers' interaction with the artworks, as they work to distinguish between photograph and reflection.

All of the displayed works play on photography's capacity to still movement and time – an aspect of the medium that Chitra Ramalingam describes in relation to early nineteenth-century photography as the ability to 'fix transience' by converting 'the spatio-temporal complexity of a dynamic event into a static, spatial, two-dimensional representation' (2010: 21). Often, these moments of fixed transience are quite ordinary: children playing in the street,

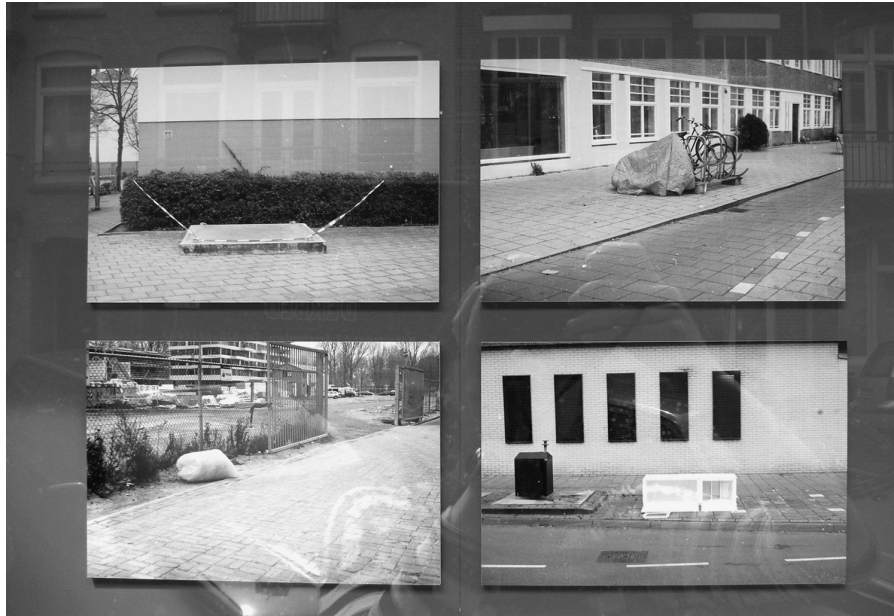


6.8 Street View: reflection of Amsterdam in photograph. Photo by Miriam Meissner.

an old man riding alone in the Metro, an elderly couple sitting together at a table inside their home. These photographs do not focus on the intense or dramatic moments of everyday life in the city. Rather, they still activities that imply slowness – activities that do not directly belong to global-urban circuits of fast labour, business and commodity exchange. Most of the activities portrayed in the photographs belong instead to the categories of walking, waiting, watching, or leisure. The remaining photographs show depopulated spaces such as an inner-city garden in New York or isolated objects on Dutch sidewalks (Figure 6.9).

Thus, in addition to the slowness that follows from the artworks' invitation to stop and look, the *Street View* project also produces slowness at the level of content. Many of the photographs show situations of inertia that form constitutive parts of different urban traffic flows. For instance, there is a photograph of a man sitting alone in a Metro in Rome, waiting for his destination to get off the train. He is forced to stop and linger while his body, enclosed in the Metro cabin, is rapidly moved through the city. Two other photographs, jointly titled 'Honk and Keep on Laughing' ('*Toeter en blijf lachen*'), depict traffic jams in the streets of Naples. Here, the representation of immobility reveals momentary pauses, stoppages and breaks that are an inescapable part of the reality of urban traffic flows.

In fact, these last two *Street View* works highlight how slowness can constitute a precondition of urban mobility, conforming with what Bissel



6.9 Street View: lonely objects. Photo by Miriam Meissner.

and Fuller describe as ‘container agency’, which ‘is best exemplified in the figure of the passenger’:

a figure carried away by the mobilization of mobility and stillness. Located at the nexus of mobility and immobility, ‘freedom’ and control, flesh and machine, it is hardly surprising that many of the most pressing and highly contested issues around governance and power literally bear down on the passenger: a figure produced through mass-mobilization. As the axiomatic figure of contemporary mobile life, the passenger prompts some disquieting questions about the agentive potentialities of stillness in its multiplicity. (Bissel and Fuller, 2011: 8)

The picture of the Rome Metro described above emphasizes how the mobility of transport involves the need to stop and integrate into pre-designed waiting spaces, such as the car or the various vehicles of public transport. All of these containers offer mobility provided that passengers follow certain rules such as traffic rules or distinct security measures.

Bissel and Fuller’s argument that container agency operates between ‘freedom and control, flesh and machine’ draws on the assumption that the submission to these ‘protocol machines that operate through the gate-logics

of measurement, calibration and sequencing' (Bissel and Fuller, 2011: 9) does not only require physically stopping but also limits mobility in terms of freedom of choice. The issue at stake, which the *Street View* photographs raise but do not resolve, is whether mobility and slowness can really be conceptualized as mutually opposed phenomena and, if not, how they are materially and socially related.

In addition to emphasizing the moments of inertia that mobile traffic entails, several *Street View* photographs portray urban subjects who are commonly understood to be excluded from the fast flows of globalization. According to Wendy Parkins, 'the unemployed, children, the elderly and women at home comprise a significant section' of this group (2004: 367). However, as a critical comment on this enumeration, Parkins asks via Kate Shaw (2001) which activities actually count as fast or slow:

Do the activities of the private sphere, for instance the care of children, count as fast or slow? Characterizations of private life as 'slow' may derive from the fact that family time is, as Shaw (2001) argues, still associated with a notion of more 'natural' or 'pre-industrial' time: 'Like pre-industrial time, family time is widely believed to be qualitatively different to work time . . . [it] is essentially anti-linear and opposed to work time, which is linear and progressive.' (Parkins, 2004: 367)

Some of the *Street View* photographs make visible this tension between fast and slow by showing so-called 'immobile' groups in deliberately mobile postures. One example is a work composed of three different photographs that show the legs of what appear to be an elderly woman, a young girl and an elderly man using a walking stick (Figure 6.10). The photographs appear to be snapshots capturing the movement of walking in slow motion. Consequently, the artwork depicts the mobility of three representatives of demographic groups often assumed to be slow, immobile, or demobilized. Interestingly, the photograph is positioned next to the 'Honk and Keep on Laughing' traffic jam images – a contrast which at least weakens the stereotypes of mobility and immobility that are commonly attached to certain social groups and modes of locomotion such as driving vs. walking.

By contrast, other photographs in the *Street View* series explicitly portray moments of physical slowness, such as the elderly couple sitting over their meal (Figure 6.11), or a woman with a headscarf who seems to be standing still on a sidewalk and statically observing the neighbourhood surrounding her. Consequently, the project draws an ambivalent picture of mobility in



6.10 Street View: slow walking. Photo by Miriam Meissner.

the urban context. What is distinctive about the *Street View* project is that it addresses this subject in relation to different urban locations worldwide. As Helen Liggett points out, ‘photography can be deployed to make connections to aspects of city life that are visible, fleeting, and not ordinarily noted’ (Liggett, 2003: 119). But instead of referring to its own geographical neighbourhood – the Kinkerbuurt – *Street View* establishes such connections by highlighting the similarities that mark what we might call a global struggle of mobility and immobility under the conditions of neoliberal urbanization.

Insofar as the project is concerned with registering and making visible this struggle, *Street View* actually ties in with the slow movement’s agenda of ‘consciously negotiating the different temporalities which make up our everyday lives’ (Parkins, 2004: 363). In doing so, it places emphasis on the different ways in which this struggle is experienced – thus highlighting the plurality and heterogeneity of the global mobility/immobility struggle, while





6.11 Street View: elderly couple crouching. Photo by Miriam Meissner.

at the same time underlining how this struggle might constitute a unifying experience, felt in diverse modes and various intensities in different places around the world.

The *Street View* photographs thus produce representations of urban street life that elude the conceptual dichotomy of mobility/immobility by presenting a more nuanced image of urban reality – an image that breaks with stereotypes labelling certain activities, spaces, or social groups as either mobile or immobile. Instead, the photographs emphasize how urban movement and stasis do not mutually exclude but, on the contrary, often implicate and presuppose each other, such as in the case of the lone subway passenger who sits still while moving. Employing photography's potential to capture experience and represent it in an interpretative fashion (Sontag, 2005: 2–4), the images make visible the ways in which, for most inhabitants, the lived experience of the city often lies somewhere in between movement and stasis. It is a sensitivity to this liminal condition that connects the *Street View* photographs to the slow movement's general aim of re-addressing the uneven, varied temporalities of everyday life in the era of globalization.

## Urban Farming

In a coincidental yet meaningful twist, the *Street View* project connects to urban slow practice in another way entirely. One of the last artworks on the



6.12 Street View: urban farming in NYC. Photo by Miriam Meissner.

walking route of the exhibition is a photograph of the Eagle Street Rooftop Farm in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, one of the world's largest rooftop vegetable gardens (at over 6,000 square feet) and a prominent international symbol of slow practice in the urban farming movement (Figure 6.12). The foreground of the photograph shows the lush, green growth of the farm's vegetable plantings, while the background is filled by the iconic skyline of Manhattan. The resonances and contrasts between the colours and shapes of both the natural and urban worlds, as well as the strange cohabitation of the two in the same photographic composition, are key components of this image and its treatment of the return of nature to the heart of the city.

The photograph's inclusion in an exhibition devoted to the urban quotidian registers the extent to which the slow practice of urban farming has become a common sight in neighbourhoods worldwide, particularly as part of community-based urban renewal initiatives. Indeed, from its marginal, countercultural origins, urban farming has grown into a widely accepted and increasingly popular and portable approach to revivifying 'dead' urban spaces



**6.13** Urban farming/computing: design for Guangming Smart-city, 2007. Courtesy of CJ Lim.

in cities ranging from Havana to Baltimore to Manila. These days, urban farming is not only supported by city councils and community groups in urban locations worldwide (Hanson and Marty, 2012; McClintock, 2010), but has also been integrated into the core of design thinking about the future of smart and sustainable cities, as CJ Lim (2010) beautifully illustrates in his case studies of ecological-urban symbiosis (Figure 6.13).

It is therefore interesting that the photograph of New York's Eagle Street Rooftop Farm is displayed in a location adjacent to one of Amsterdam's own urban farming experiments, a large and contested open space known as the Bellamytuin (Figure 6.14). Sandwiched between a busy canal and a disused





6.14 Bellamytuin: urban farm-pods. Photo by Miriam Meissner.

tram depot (itself a site of creative experimentation with public use), the Bellamytuin is the location of the former city council headquarters for the Oud West (Old West) district of Amsterdam. The building was demolished in 2010 as part of the amalgamation of Oud West into the new municipal super-district, Amsterdam West. Since then, a lengthy and heated public debate has ensued over the future use of the land. While the debate continues, local community organizations have temporarily appropriated the space with the backing of the city council, transforming it from an abandoned construction site into what could be described as a pop-up park. Rolls of turf have been laid, makeshift benches and garbage cans have been installed, fences have been retrofitted with gates and, perhaps most significantly, a large number of urban farm-pods have been spread across the space.

The organization behind the pods and much of the clean-up operation is Stadsboeren (City-Farmers), a non-profit volunteer-based urban farming collective which, supported by the city council, local art foundations and select corporate sponsors, programmes various kinds of events and activities at the site in addition to the farming itself, including community picnics, organic growing clinics, educational school visits and an urban farming festival. As

outlined on its website, the group's approach to curating this space is informed by an ethic of slowness taken from the global organic food and urban farming movements (Stadsboeren, 2012). In particular, Stadsboeren is focused on drawing community members into the space of the Bellamytuin to promote greener living through slow practice.

The links between urban creativity policy and slow practice initiatives like Stadsboeren are sufficiently complex to be the subject of an article in their own right. The point we wish to stress here, however, is the juxtaposition of slow art and slow practice, and the ways in which this spatial proximity – between a photograph of urban farming and a site of urban farming – reveals a convergence of aesthetic form and spatial practice in the shared critique of accelerated living. Such proximity also establishes another point of transnational connection and exchange between Amsterdam and other sites of creative urbanism.

## Slow Flow

In closing, it is worth highlighting that there are some significant parallels between the 'Piet Hein' and Haarlemmerplein construction sites and the Kinkerbuurt *Street View* project. All three are concerned with the potential for spatial and social estrangement in the globalizing city's 'new spatial order' (Marcuse and Van Kempen, 2000: 3). More importantly, all three are aesthetically designed to produce deceleratory urban experiences, which encourage pause and reflection, maybe even detour and delay.

Even so, there are also some very important differences between the projects. One crucial difference is that the construction site photos are designed to screen urban change and distract from the neighbourhood's homogenization by evoking precisely the conditions of community and heterogeneity that are disappearing, partly because of developments like the construction projects themselves and the generic urbanism to which they belong. This is a dynamic linked to the kind of gentrification Sharon Zukin (2010) writes about in *The Naked City*, where she identifies how the consumer delirium of contemporary urban living is eroding the authenticity of place, creating more and more spaces that possess the appearance, but not the substance, of neighbourhood and community. Zukin's focus is on New York, but the trend is happening everywhere, including Amsterdam, as Zukin herself has noted in her analysis of the upscale Utrechtsestraat shopping area (Zukin, 2011).

The issue can be reframed in Peck's terms by suggesting that the construction site photos belong to what he calls the 'viral geography of creativity' (Peck, 2011: 481), by which he is referring to the vehicularity of urban creativity and the ways in which the idea of urban creativity is being feverishly adopted in regeneration policies across cities worldwide. The effect is to reduce individual sites of creative endeavour, such as the construction site photos we have discussed, to just another generic node in a global network of creative urbanism; what Peck describes as 'no more than another event space in the sphere of circulating images and investments' (Peck, 2011: 482).

By contrast, the *Street View* project in the Kinkerbuurt does something slightly different, even if it does ultimately connect to the same broader dynamic of gentrification, creativity and renewal, contributing to Amsterdam's increasingly branded profile as a creative city. Rather than using slow art to distort or screen urban change, *Street View* uses slow art to make that change newly visible. Specifically, it does so by revealing the transformative ties between the neighbourhood community and the mobile, migrant experiences of globalization, which can be seen in the images, but also experienced through the exhibition's perambulatory viewing conditions and the spaces, streets and windows through which it guides the public. Crucial here is that the project does this not in order to join or exploit the neoliberal hype of creative urbanism (although it forms part of the background noise of that hype), but rather to generate an alternative, decelerated flow of art and people within the global city, focused on the transnational possibilities and resonances of contemporary urban citizenship.

Most of all, however, *Street View* illustrates the overall argument running through this chapter's analysis of slow art in the creative city. As we demonstrate in relation to urban renewal initiatives in Amsterdam, slowness and creativity are deeply implicated in contemporary transformations of urban social space. While creativity has long been a focus of scholarly work on globalization and cities, slowness (like related concepts such as inertia, stillness and immobility) has only begun to attract serious critical attention relatively recently, and its interrelations with creative urbanism remain under-examined. Yet, as our examples of slow art illustrate, slowness can be strategically employed to interrupt the accelerated urbanism of globalization and open up new creative spaces in which to explore issues of place, community and belonging. The fact that slowness can also be appropriated or deployed by the creativity syndrome in contemporary urbanism does not diminish its

significance. Rather, such complications point to the critical potential of slowness – in its multiple valences, articulations and practices – to operate both against and within the accelerated flows of the global city.

### Note

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# 7

## Viennese Inertia: Cultural and Political Deceleration and Local Identity Construction

Heide Kunzelmann and Elisabeth Mayerhofer

### Introduction

This article aims to exemplify how Henri Lefebvre's theory of spatial dialectics, his concept of everyday life and his introduction of rhythm as a qualifier for cultural analysis of urban spaces can be used to describe the curious synchronicity of past and present that seems to shape Vienna's global image as a positively inert city. By focusing on urban dynamics in a material and musical context, we show how the historical discourses of *Gemütlichkeit* (cosiness) and *Heimat* (home) are dangerously conflated with current discourses of European migration and how Viennese inertia can be critically contextualized in this respect.

Our main argument is that it was European integration and the collapse of the bipolar world that brought Vienna out of its centuries-long torpor and resulted from the city's status as imperial centre. As the bourgeoisie-dominated capital of the industrial revolution in Austria in the nineteenth century and the original historical centre of the Habsburg Empire until 1918, Vienna faced radical demographic changes in the twentieth century, particularly after 1945 and at the turn of the millennium. The first considerable rise of the number of foreign nationals coincided with the arrival of migrant workers from Turkey and the former Yugoslavia, the so-called *Gastarbeiter*

(guest workers) who were invited to Austria on the basis of the Raab/Olah treaty of 1961 (Medien-Servicestelle Neue Österreicher/innen, 2013), in order to support Austria's economic restitution in a country where wages were more competitive than in their home countries and where workers were needed for the booming economy. Many of those migrants settled down in the capital and never returned to their home countries, as was originally envisaged by the Austrian government that had naively wanted the workforce but not an increase in migrant population. When Austria joined the European Union in 1995, a second wave of migration brought about a considerable demographic change; again, it was the urban centre, Vienna, to which people predominantly moved.<sup>1</sup> As the second decade in the twenty-first century starts, '1,569 million people living in Austria in 2011 [have] a migrant background (equivalent to 18.9% of the population)';<sup>2</sup> the majority of these (compared to the per capita number of people with a non-migrant background) live in Vienna (Statistik Austria, 2012: 21).

These radical changes in urban demographics will be contrasted to tropes of inertia that are to be found in urban spatial particularities, like architectural fusions of old and new, and in characteristically prominent representations of rhythms with a tendency to 3/4 time signature of the waltz (3/4 time). They will be discussed as a result of a discursive conflation of the material, the political and the symbolic, using aspects of Lefebvre's theory of everyday life (*le quotidien*) (Lefebvre 1991 and 2002) and his 'rhythmanalysis' (2004). In particular, Lefebvre's metaphor of the urban space as a 'seashell' that embodies the forms and actions of an ancient community which resembles the soft living centre of the animal, 'shaping its shell [i.e. the city], building and rebuilding it, modifying it again and again and again according to its needs' (Lefebvre, 1995: 116), provides a useful means to illustrate the consequences of the incongruous development of a quickly growing centre and a demonstratively inert and rather static shell, hampering any spontaneous revolutionary urban development. Vienna's 'shell' is represented by its city centre, dominated by imperial *palazzi* and boulevards with *Ringstraßen*-buildings ('ring road'-buildings), built in the so-called *Gründerzeit* style, which was described by Hugo Hantsch, an art historian, Catholic cleric and well-known monarchist, on an information website supported by Austrian Ministry for Education and Arts, as the 'style of liberalism and its optimistic views of life and the economy, and at the same time an expression of the inner turmoil characteristic of a new age no longer committed to a uniform established order' (Hantsch, n.d.).

## Modernist Melancholia and Rhythm

This inner turmoil can be read as a part of a ‘modernist melancholia’ as Ludger Heidbrink has described it (Heidbrink, 1994). Heidbrink understands this particular form as an aesthetically reflected melancholia and sadness that, other than in instances where individuals experience feelings of loss and resignation, is the result of an effort of imagination and self-performance. The modernist, turn-of-the-century, decadent, melancholic individual transforms its emotional state into an artistic product, be it a building or a musical composition (Heidbrink, 1994: 78). With regards to Lefebvre’s rhythmanalysis, his ‘attempt to theorise how the connections between space and time unfold in everyday life’ (Butler, 2012: 31), we can therefore read certain rhythmical structures prominently associated with urban culture and urban everyday life as symbols for a specific stance on historical and social development. In other words, if a particular rhythm, like the 3/4 time of the Viennese waltz, achieves a ubiquitous and prominent status in a city’s identity and market profile, then we can assume it influences, pervades and also shapes everyday life. The 3/4 time signature represents the cyclical, the ever-returning history and the continuity of an ideal societal structure governed by bourgeois values and beliefs.

A good example for the way the waltz as a motive was used to symbolize historical continuity is the widespread popularity achieved by the film *Der Kongress tanzt* (*The Congress Dances*), which first came out in 1931, directed by Eric Charell and produced by the German Ufa (Universum Film AG), the main production company for German films at that time. The film was released in German, English and French for reasons of market competitiveness and its multilingual cast included international stars like Lilian Harvey and Willy Fritsch. Set in the year of the Viennese Congress in ~~1814~~ 1815, Vienna is presented as the capital of European politics, of love and of the waltz. In 1955, Franz Antel, director of many immensely popular comedies in the Austrian Second Republic, released a remake of *Der Kongress tanzt*, emphasizing the unifying element of the waltz that transgresses ideological borders and attributes lightness to historical events, subtly referring to the signing of the *Staatsvertrag* (Austrian State Treaty) in the same year that guaranteed Austria neutrality and independence from the Allied Forces. Here, the Viennese waltz serves as a metaphor for historical continuity and civilized communication and supports the notion that Austria and especially the people of its capital are to find a politically progressive message in the look back to the times before



National Socialism and the turmoil of the First Republic (~~1921–1938~~). The circular character of the 3/4 time signature has become a metaphor for the constant return to the beginning, favouring an anti-teleological, hedonistic and oblivious approach to history, leading to cultural stasis. Or, as historian Richard Mitten puts it: '[r]eality was definitely not for export' (Mitten, 1992: 2).

Despite the successful repositioning of Vienna as a global brand for a unity of high *and* popular culture, 'Waltzing in Vienna' today still forms an important part of the city's marketing concept, as a short video clip entitled *Alles Walzer* on Vienna's official 2013 marketing website illustrates (Wien Tourismus, 2013). Short impressions of dancing partners of mixed ethnic background, who eagerly wait for the waltz to start and try out a few swirls, only to eventually revert to full-blown waltzing movements, are complemented by a soundtrack that inconspicuously hints at the famous versions of Johann Strauss's waltzes but never really breaks out into the sweeping, grand orchestral renditions everyone associates with the dance. With regard to the demographic developments over the past decades that were discussed earlier, this shows that the authorities' awareness has changed, while the underlying rhythmical trope of stasis in circular movement remains the same.

The 3/4 time, with its three crotchet beats to the bar and the third beat often delayed for musical effect, has become part of the discourse of Viennese identity since the Strauss brothers, Johann and Eduard, and Josef Lanner rose to fame as composers and performers of this particularly artistic and aesthetically sensationalist genre. The waltz as a genre was commodified as a rhythmic export with the advent of the New Year's Concert in 1939, during the first year after the *Anschluss*, Austria's annexation by Hitler's Germany (Hellsberg, n.d.). Ever since then, Vienna's public discourse about music and rhythm has been influenced by the waltz as a genre and a reminder of the city's history – sometimes to the extent that musical revolution explicitly targets the waltz as ideal object, well aware of the hegemonic status the genre has in the city's identity discourse.

But how does the waltz's prominent position in the Viennese urban identity discourse read against Lefebvre's observations about urban rhythms? Chris Butler explains how, for Lefebvre, the 'everyday in contemporary urbanised societies is modelled in linear or quantified times' (Butler, 2012: 32). Lefebvre considered quantified time to be 'temporarily dictated by clocks and watches' (Lefebvre and Régulier, 1999: 6) – or a metronome – and

argued that this linear time produced patterns of repetition that influence our daily practices by ‘mask[ing] and crush[ing] the cycles’ (Lefebvre, 1987: 10). For Lefebvre, urban spaces ooze social rhythms that represent the collective attempt to live ‘in rhythm with biological and cyclical forms of repetition’ (Butler, 2012: 32), like day and night, the seasons or, in our case, a dominant musical pattern that pervades the everyday life of the Viennese on several levels: through the media, through tourism and advertisements, through a history of public political discourse that returns again and again to the distant imperial past as a retrospectively glorified model for multi-ethnic coexistence under an Austrian-German directorate.

Lefebvre, according to Butler,

argues that the prevalence of linear repetition within all spheres of social practice is also embedded within more general processes [...] The continual renewal of constitutive [social] relations increasingly is dependent on reproducibility and the presentation of the repeated as new. The symptoms of this appear in the false nostalgia for the reproduction and imitation of *œuvres* from previous social formations. . . . (Butler, 2012: 33)

With regards to the waltz and the 3/4 rhythm, Vienna today has positioned itself in a curious dialectic process of staging the relationship between what Lefebvre calls ‘linear’ time, symbolized by the repetitive constancy of a metronome, and the cyclical beat, which both suggests a constant gathering of momentum via the frequent slight delay on the last beat that creates a merry-go-round effect, starting the new round with even more drive,<sup>3</sup> and that on the other hand stands for a particular inert quality of ‘everyday life’ – in the twentieth century as well as today.

Any discussion of Viennese inertia, therefore, needs to start with establishing the political and cultural factors that have supported the symbolic prevalence of the aforementioned rhythmic deceleration as the main form of linear repetition in urban spaces and that have – and still do – pervade the public and private space as discourses. These factors are, first, the concept of *Heimat* as the utopian end-point of an individual and collective journey governed by the dialectically circular linearity that is also to be found in the waltz; and secondly, it is a discourse of *Gemütlichkeit*, a specific Viennese form of ~~laid~~ laid-back deceleration that seems to override any attempt to accelerate. In the following chapters, the staging of the 3/4 rhythm will be the starting point for a discussion of the commodification of social time under

the heading of *Gemütlichkeit*, in order to show how urban space in Vienna has been constructed around a myth of an ‘Old Vienna’ in the twentieth century – and how the city adapts, or rather, finds it difficult to adapt to the demographic changes taking place in the wake of the creation of a unified Europe.

### ***Wiener Gemütlichkeit: Slowness, Inertia and Backwardness as Constituents of the Local Identity of ‘Old Vienna’***

Popular culture of the twentieth century provides us with the metaphorical and symbolical evidence that the 3/4 time signature was indeed part of the underlying cyclical structure of Viennese culture at the beginning of the last century. In 1929, Federico García Lorca wrote a poem entitled ‘*Pequeño vals Vienés*’ (‘Little Viennese Waltz’), a surrealist piece of text that subscribes to the rhythm of the perpetual, characteristic return of the heavy-footed first beat of the triple-timed waltz, and which would later be translated and put to music by song-writer Leonard Cohen (‘Take this Waltz’, *Poets in New York*, 1986). García Lorca gives this and another poem the heading ‘*Huída de Nueva York: Dos vales hacia la civilización*’ – ‘Escape from New York. Two Waltzes towards Civilization’ – and attributes the melancholic atmosphere of a place in decay, of love during the last days of mankind, preserved in an eternal dance, to the city he sees as reflecting this oxymoronic relationship of eternity and everlasting fading, of movement and inertia – Vienna. By contrasting New York as a metaphor of progress through acceleration with the city of Vienna, García Lorca reiterates the metaphorical power of the decadent Vienna as a beacon of modern European civilization. Here, civilization is intrinsically connected to the aforementioned modernist melancholia.

In ~~fin-de-siècle~~ Austria, the discourse of modernist melancholia is informed by a dialectical notion of social progress (civilization) through historical and cultural stasis. In his seminal study *The Habsburg Myth in Austrian Literature*, Claudio Magris describes the curiously contradictory ‘autumnal’ state of being decadently inert as the core of a myth that created a collective feeling of togetherness among Austrians in the nineteenth century, based on the emotional bonds between one’s *Heimat* (home)<sup>4</sup> and an emotional sense of *Gemütlichkeit* (conviviality, cosiness) (Magris, 2000: 36–40). It is part of Magris’s thesis that this particular myth, constructed around an idea of a monarchy carried by and working for the people, and perpetuated through literature, music and architecture, disguises disguised the absence of a dynamic

centre of power. According to Magris, the idea of Vienna around 1900 as the centre of civilization, metonymically perceived as the geographical and conceptual centre of a middle-European ideal, is symptomatically defined by tropes of inertia, like the discourse of *Gemütlichkeit* introduced above, that is represented not least through the dynamics of a waltz's 3/4 time.

Contrary to other big European cities in the early nineteenth century, Vienna developed a distinctive local identity of slowness – the Viennese *Gemütlichkeit*, a term which generally translates as 'cosiness' or 'conviviality', but actually expresses a feeling combining both aspects with an added notion of deceleration. Brigitta Schmidt-Lauber defines *Gemütlichkeit* as a leisure concept in opposition to work, where time and space are clearly structured by external rules (Schmidt-Lauber, 2003: 12). Its origins go back to the early nineteenth century when the censorship and rigid political system under Chancellor Klemens Fürst Metternich's rule caused Vienna's citizens to withdraw into the safe, private sphere of their homes. The Viennese variation of *Gemütlichkeit* is therefore always connected to sociability and common activities such as eating, drinking and singing together, going out, and so on, as long as the activity is not political (Musner, 2009: 178). The refined, domestic style of the Biedermeier is symptomatic of the first emergence of a bourgeois lifestyle at the margins of politics.

Lutz Musner (2009: 178) shows how the social standstill caused by the authoritarian regime under Chancellor Metternich generated an introverted, apolitical society in Austria. The concept of *Gemütlichkeit* served as a means of constructing a local identity in order to distinguish Vienna from the up-and-coming Berlin in the first half of the nineteenth century (Musner, 2009: 182; Mikoletzky, 1992: 401). Culture and a specific 'Viennese' way of life were opposed to the economic rise of Berlin. Central to this way of life was a refusal of progress that manifested itself in a firmly fixed backwards gaze at the glories of the past – the origins of the myth of 'Old Vienna' as a characteristic of the 'real', the 'authentic' Viennese.

### Urban Growth, Social Changes and a Radical Mayor: The Roots of an Image of Standstill

The *fin de siècle* was a time when Vienna's population went through a profound crisis of identity. Between 1800 (approx. 250,000 inhabitants) and 1910 (approx. two million inhabitants) the population multiplied almost by ten, about a half of it having migrated from poorer, rural regions

of the empire to the city. The Austrian writer Gerhard Roth elaborates how, in 1867, the Jewish population was awarded an equal civic status by the monarch, their ~~centuries~~ centuries-old discrimination against them was abolished and the social advancement of the Jewish bourgeoisie began (Roth, 1991: 49–51). The demographic changes directly resulted from social dynamics that were caused by major construction projects such as the construction of a modern water line (1870–73) and the representative buildings alongside the *Ringstraße* (approx. 1860–90). This resulted not only in the emergence of a larger bourgeoisie, but also in the labour movement emerging from the new social stratum of workers that had migrated from the provinces, then including also Bohemia and the Southern Slavic regions.

The bourgeoisie, adhering to regional and conservative standards, quickly established a political stronghold in the Austro-Hungarian capital and paved the way for political forces that, unlike the Emperor Franz-Joseph, were in favour of cultural segregation when it came to the different ethnic and religious groups joined under the umbrella of the monarchy (Roth, 1991: 51). The election of the populist anti-Semite Karl Lueger as ~~mayor~~ Mayor of Vienna in 1897 demonstrated tendencies of political radicalization. Lueger's ~~program~~ was based on aggressive petty-bourgeois politics that worked against a modernization through exclusion of every group in society that seemed to undermine *Heimat*- and *Gemütlichkeit*-oriented tendencies by the multi-ethnicity and multilingualism ingrained in their very existence – such as the Jewish-Austrian population. The anti-Semitic atmosphere was the direct consequence of the then current political rhetoric. In 1898 a deputy in the Vienna City Council asked for a *Schussgeld für Juden*,<sup>5</sup> a 'bounty on Jews'. The path towards National Socialism was paved. This dystopian construction of a disrupted and ~~de-based~~ society effectively formed the background for Karl Lueger's strategic look back at the ideal of a stable past that was based on the arts and culture. Lueger publicly constructed an 'Old Viennese' identity of *Autorität*, *Paternalismus*, *Vätererbe* und *christlich-katholischem Wertgefüge* (authority, paternalism, the ~~fore-fathers~~ heritage and a Catholic-Christian value system) (Musner, 2009: 11).

Lueger successfully used techniques of popular and, effectively, a populist culture to increase his political footing in Vienna; he inspired musical pieces he himself had commissioned (e.g. the Lueger-Marsch, Eduard Nerradt, 1893) or had postcards featuring his portrait printed. After his death in 1934

under the Austro-Fascist regime of Kurt Schuschnigg, a play in his honour, called *Lueger, der große Österreicher* (*Lueger, the Great Austrian*) (Hans Naderer, 1934), was brought to the stage, accompanied by ubiquitous propaganda measures. In 1943 the Nazi regime produced the film *Wien 1910* (E.W. Emo), again emphasising the myth of the '*schöne[r] Karl*' ('dashing Karl') Lueger, who had managed to render himself a popular myth during his mandate. Through retrospectively reading Lueger's public appeal and his anti-Semitic political discourse of historical and cultural inertia against their very own agenda, Hitler's propagandists aimed at coining a mythical notion of absolution through historical stasis, i.e. the idea of redeeming the present of warfare through ~~the~~ an idealized, patriotic past.

During this period Vienna's architectural world started to adapt in order to fulfil the requirements of Lueger's 'Old Vienna'. Friedrich Achleitner, architect and avant-garde writer of the 1950s, elaborates on the importance of images for this particular discourse, using the example of the fiery discussions about a restructuring of the square in front of ~~St.~~ Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna's city centre. Achleitner's example perfectly represents the dialectics of space in a Lefebvrian sense, as it is also discussed by Andrew Merrifield. Space is understood as a process as well as a state of being, and social relationships not only shape space but *are* space (Merrifield, 1993: 520). The Lefebvrian concept of the 'right to the city' as 'the right to change ourselves by changing the city' (Harvey, 2008: 23) in this case, however, is subsumed by the hegemonic discourse of 'Old Vienna', so that change paradoxically means the realization of a mythical narrative.

In 1832 Biedermeier ~~star-painter~~ Rudolf von Alt painted a view of the cathedral from a perspective that did not exist at that moment. Von Alt's pictures of Vienna were very popular in the nineteenth century and thus countless copies were sold. Consequently, So when in the 1890s vast demolition works took place in the 1890s in order to renovate the place square in front of ~~St.~~ Stephen's, its planners followed Rudolf von Alt's vision of the fictional, 'Old Viennese' perspective on the cathedral. Although this view on the square had never existed, it had been engraved in the public memory in such a way that the public demanded the sight to construction in its image when the whole area was due to being renovated. Many medieval buildings were destroyed as a consequence of this distinctly anti-modernist manifestation of cultural regression to a simulacrum (Achleitner, 2004: 20; Musner, 2009: 22).

## Arts and Culture as the Base of *Gemütlichkeit* – *Alt Wien* (Old Vienna) as Spatial Practice

In his book *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre distinguishes between three approaches to the dialectical and complex relationship between spatial relations, as presented by Chris Butler: ‘representations of space, . . . forms of abstract knowledge that are connected to formal and institutional apparatuses of power involved in the organization of space’ (Butler 2012: 40), ‘representational spaces [that] are closely associated with the social and bodily functions of lived experience’ (Butler, 2012: 41) and

spatial practices [that] are the physical practices, everyday routines, networks and pathways through which the totality of social life is reproduced. These practices include both individually embodied social rhythms and collective patterns of movement within inhabited spaces. Within a particular society, spatial practices retain a certain cohesion and continuity and facilitate communication and social exchange, but [t]hey correspond to the realm of the perceived – in the sense that they arise out of the perception of empirical reality, rather than as the product of a process of intellectual reflection. (Butler, 2012: 40)

In the following paragraphs we will elucidate how the concept of *Alt Wien* can be understood as a spatial practice in a Lefebvrian way, influencing the political, the social and the cultural public discourse in Vienna.

As much as architecture embodied the visual identity of *Alt Wien*, it was rhythm that became the central carrier of the myth of ‘Old Vienna’. This notion was systematically supported through representative buildings for performances, sumptuous parades and a culture of memory that manifested itself in monuments and memorials, street names, so-called *Ehrengräber* (graves for honourable members of society), and events such as an international exhibition in 1892 about music and theatre from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards (Nußbaumer, 2007: 372). To emphasize the global importance of music from ‘Old Vienna’, the expression ‘*Wiener Klassik*’ was introduced, a loose canon of ‘classical’ Viennese music based on the works of Josef Hayden, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Ludwig van Beethoven (not, incidentally, an Austrian composer by birth or nationality but considered one by virtue of aesthetics), who had revolutionized the musical scene at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Consequently, Vienna gradually



cemented its stereotypical image as a ‘city of music’. It was an image that, yet again, had been constructed with strong reference to the past and with a collective eye on deceleration. And it was this image that, in 2012, prompted Nikolaus Harnoncourt to start his *Walzer Revolution*.

Under the aforementioned Viennese mayor Karl Lueger, the cultural discourse shifted increasingly to the transfiguration of a pre-modern idyll, emphasizing the national character and loosing the initial cosmopolitan, liberal orientation of the mid-nineteenth century. The architecture of the *Ringstraße*, according to Lefebvre’s rhythmanalysis, became the hard shell.

However popular the narrative perpetuated by the dominating Christian-conservative political discourse may seem, there were also numerous voices that helped construct a counter-myth to the hegemonic presence of the cultural stasis of ‘Old Vienna’. Lutz Musner elaborates how the articles written by the journalist and satirist Anton Kuh provide an excellent example for a slightly delayed critique of Viennese inertia (Musner, 2009: 149). Kuh, who was amongst the numerous intellectuals who went to Berlin after ~~the~~ First World War in order to find better working conditions than those available in the crisis-shaken Vienna, writes openly about the rivalry between the two cities. The cities are seen in opposition to each other, with Vienna representing the past, decadence and a certain sloppiness (above all when it comes to work), and with Berlin standing for the future, for tight, effective organization and an ethos of hard work. Kuh criticizes Vienna’s old-fashioned quality and provincial narrowness by playing off ~~Alt-Wien~~ against a modernist concept of ~~Neu-Wien~~ (New Vienna) (Kuh, 1923: 3), placing the latter somewhere in between the two poles of ‘Old Vienna’-backwardness and the extreme sense of acceleration that was prevalent in modern Berlin:

And the Berlin-born? His sayings and idioms show his sense of the current; his hatred for antiquated feelings; his love of quick movements; his dislike for verbosity. The fact alone that he says ‘laufen’ (to run) when he means ‘gehen’ (to go/to walk) says it all; he hasn’t got time to ‘walk’ in the usual sense, like, for example, the Viennese do: they’re walking while reading the papers or looking at a sparrow on the roof-top. (qtd. in Denscher, n.d.)

It is an instance of the linear repetition of fast steps against the image of circularly swaying, waltzing feet. Kuh’s words show an appreciation of the Prussian sense of focus, speed and efficiency that would soon turn into a

generally-perceived vice in the context of National Socialism, where German efficiency became feared and despised as a national stereotype facilitating genocide.

The typical Austrian slowness as portrayed by Kuh soon had its discursive mythical power renewed when, after the caesura of ~~The the Second~~ World War, high-culture and hospitality as distinctly Austrian traits were opposed to the German *Zivilisationsbruch* (rupture of civilization). In ~~post-war~~ Austria, passive resistance against the Nazi regime was being repeatedly stylized as a Viennese character trait, drawing on the values of constancy and, again, a regionally patriotic orientation towards the glorious past. Austria's status as the 'first victim of National Socialism' (as proclaimed by Austrian ~~post-war~~ government) would only be underlined by popular culture. The science-fiction film *1. April 2000* (1952) was financed by the Austrian ~~post-war~~ government and shows Austria as a peaceful nation of music lovers and dancers, incapable of doing any harm. The film's director, Wolfgang Liebeneiner, had been a highly-ranked official in the *Reichsfilmkammer* (Reichs Film Chamber) during the National Socialist reign, influencing the film industry of this era in his regulatory capacity. His nomination as director of this prominent patriotic and highly ideologized ~~post-war~~ production that perpetuated the myth of 'Old Vienna' through its content, reintroduced the sense of political inertia on a meta-aesthetic level through the effect of seeing someone appointed to helm this prominent patriotic and highly ideologically-inflected ~~post-war~~ production that perpetuated the myth of 'Old Vienna' who would redirect the eye of the beholder towards a distant, pre-modernist past. Appropriating the distant future of the year 2000 to stage a pageant of Imperial Vienna only supports the notion of a deeply dialectic understanding of history. The film production of the 1950s continued to present the image of peaceful, harmless Imperial Austria by producing mainly romantic comedies, often in historic or rural settings and with an imperial backdrop, as for example in the popular *Sissi* films of Ernst Marischka (1955, 1956 and 1957). It was the endeavour to construct a charming pre-industrial image that culminated in the globally-known popular musical *The Sound of Music* (1965). Despite being a Hollywood production, the film shapes a stereotypical image of Austria as a nation of believers in a grand version of 'Old Austria' as an enlargement of 'Old Vienna' in many countries up to this day.

The 1970s put an end to this glossy innocence and emphasized different aesthetics based on a new political approach towards the arts and culture. For the first time in Austrian history, the Social Democrats came into power

with an absolute majority, which changed the public approach to notions of progress, albeit not quickly. Following the Swedish model, a welfare state system was set up. At the same time, a younger generation of artists started to publically address the past of the Nazi era and the attempts of ~~post-war~~ society to cover up Austria's role with silence. Writers such as Elfriede Jelinek, Peter Handke, Thomas Bernhard ~~or~~ and Hans Lebert portrayed Austria as a stubborn, hypocritical and stifling nation, built upon mass murder without regret or excuses, using aesthetic strategies of exaggeration, provocation and monological repetition. This aesthetic shift was also reflected by a movement labelled *Wiener Aktionismus* (Viennese Actionism) in the visual arts, that staged highly provocative artistic interventions, challenging the authorities. In this context, the image of Vienna as a serene space of music, dance and painting was crudely being revised.

A prominent example of cultural action in favour of a gradual image-shift from *Alt Wien* towards a more sinister and critical perspective on the city are the ~~post-war~~ avant-gardists' attempts to de-construct the myth of 'Old Vienna' by using the Viennese dialect as a means to uncover the ugly and morally abysmal side of a city of murderers and monsters, aesthetically, and rather indirectly, processing the city's imminent National Socialist past while revolutionizing the use of the Viennese dialect as a rhythmical tool resembling music rather than language. Many prose texts and poems of that time are populated with cannibals, vampires or Frankenstein-like creatures. Well-known in this context is a poem by the writer Hans Carl Artmann from 1958, entitled '*Blauboad*' ('Blue Beard') and referring to a *Ringlgschbüübsizza*, (the owner of a merry-go-round), who turns out to be a serial axe murderer. Artmann adapts the original ~~folk-tale~~ of the Bluebeard, the seventeenth-century nobleman who slaughtered his wives until his last wife escaped his murderous intent (Hermansson, 2009), and transposes it into the milieu of a funfair – alluding to the famous Prater (Vienna's big fairground) and giving the murderer the profession of a carnny. The metaphorical proximity of place (the Prater as Vienna's most popular urban recreational area with one of the city's main attractions), the Riesenrad (the giant Ferris wheel) and civilizational inertia within the circular movement of the merry-go-round is not accidental. The poem subverts the image of *Gemütlichkeit* in connection with the topos of the merry-go-round and its inert 3/4-time rhythm representing continuity on the ground level, and seems to dig into the basement of the Viennese soul, where the unspeakable is to be found. Without risking an over-interpretation of the poem, it can safely be

concluded that the attempt to unsettle the image of a romanticized *Alt Wien* is to be made obvious through plot, language and the de-construction of sacrosanct products of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois leisure spaces.

Artmann manages to re-define the Viennese dialect, that had been cherished by followers of the *Alt Wien* myth since the times of the Viennese *Volkstheater* (the people's theatre) tradition in the eighteenth century, as a linguistic variety that is no longer rooted in *Heimat* feelings and *Gemütlichkeit*. On the contrary, the distinct Viennese idiom is the language of death, decay and evil. Furthermore, Artmann programmatically twists the idea of a merry-go-round as the symbol of standstill into a spiral staircase which does lead somewhere – a descent to hell. Once again, the image of the circular movement representing inertia comes to mind, but this time decadence has a downward direction and descends slowly but steadily towards a dystopian point of no return.

Artmann's work, along with that of other avant-garde writers such as Gerhard Rühm, Oswald Wiener or the aforementioned Friedrich Achleitner, initiated a discursive shift with regards to the public image of Vienna. Ever since the 1950s, a subversive view on the city's petty-bourgeois inertia has been prevalent in Austrian literature as a theme, a motive or a symbol, although it did not reach the general public discourse until late in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, this artistic critique has gradually developed a certain momentum. In December 2011, the Austrian press reported protests against a number of expressions taken from Artmann's *Austrian-German Dictionary* (Wintersberger and Artmann, 1995) and engraved into the glass walls of the 'Skylink' terminal at Vienna Airport. The passages were intended to extend the city's welcome wishes to the new arrivals and to represent the city as a global metropolis that was also favourably, and indeed ironically, aware of its problematic and/or subversive heritage. Instead the move by the airport's management initiated a wild public discussion about the possible damage dialect expressions synonymous with female genitalia or with the act of urinating would do to Vienna's image as a 'city of the world'. Undermining Vienna's image as centre of bourgeois grandeur still seems to be widely regarded as an offence against Vienna's imperial past, verging on the criminal for some. Yet this reaction, owed to a sense of preserving one's identity through staying inert, seems also to have been gradually converted into a post-ironic reception of culturally subversive artistic productions in Austria that were initially aimed at counteracting political and cultural inertia.

When the TV series *Ein echter Wiener geht nicht unter* (1975–9), which translates as *The Genuine Viennese Will Never Go Down* and showed the everyday life of a working-class family without embellishment and a good deal of exaggerated dialogues in vernacular, was aired from 1975–79 by the ORF, the Austrian national broadcasting company, it initially provoked ferocious debates about the portrayal of the Viennese that was deemed distorting, shameful and undermining the conservative image of bourgeois Vienna. Here, the core aspects of Viennese culture – *Gemütlichkeit* and a penchant for a circular repetition – are being subjected to an unsparingly rigorous de-construction of the bourgeois idea of working-class inertia, by ironically depicting the banality and repetition of the everyday working-class life. The Viennese and Austrian public of the 1970s was watching a commodified, satirical image of inertia, and reacted to it initially as if it was an openly political discussion of society's values, not an ironic TV production. For a while, subversive tendencies expressed via irony and satire managed to disturb the typically circular type of Viennese inertia that reproduced the image of *Alt Wien*, the 'genuine' Vienna (*das echte Wien*), on a regular basis in daily life. By ironically presenting highly exaggerated examples of working-class types that seemingly corroborated a bourgeois myth of the inert working-class, the real target of the series was precisely that myth.

Today the series is part of the pop-cultural identity of Vienna and has seen several re-releases, with a feature film based upon it being released in 2010. A post-ironic position towards the then critically subversive TV production has been integrated into the repertoire of Viennese urban discourse, rendering the concept ineffective as a tool for provocation. As in many other instances, the cyclical tendency in the political and cultural discourse overrides the more linear, teleological form of a subversive and critical discourse. By re-commodifying the already commodified satirical image of inertia, for example through printing the most vulgar comments of the series' main character on mugs and T-shirts, and selling them as an alternative version of *echtes Wien* (genuine Vienna), historical Viennese inertia reclaims space in a truly capitalist fashion. It seems that the discourse of *Gemütlichkeits* has developed asphyxiating qualities, assimilating critical discourse to prevent it spreading in the space that, according to Lefebvre, is more than a geographical location or a commodity, 'but is a political instrument, part of the relations of production and property ownership, and a means of creative and aesthetic expression' (Butler, 2012: 37). After satire in the Austrian ~~post-war~~ period

and the following decades managed to strip bare the *Gemütlichkeits*-discourse and bring its conservative agenda of the dogmatic exclusion of progressive tendencies paired with right-wing ideology to the surface, the spatial practice of exerting Viennese cosiness and a staged calmness on behalf of a past urban image has become an integral part of the ~~Heimat-~~discourse in a fierce political debate around the topic of immigration.

The turn of the twentieth to the twenty-first century seems to have brought about a more refined differentiation in the reception of artistic representations of the *Alt Wien* myth alongside the dialectic relationship between space and social class, but with globalization and, particularly, the European integration came new challenges for Vienna as the capital of a small state. The following paragraphs are devoted to the discussion of more recent discursive representations of inert *Gemütlichkeit* in the context of ~~postmodern~~ and even post-~~postmodern~~ Vienna.

### **‘Old Vienna’s’ *Gemütlichkeit* Today**

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Vienna has experienced recurring waves of massive immigration since the turn of the twenty-first century: in 2009, 44 per cent of the population were considered to have a migratory background. Therefore, after the first geopolitical shock in 1989, which moved Vienna from the European periphery right to the centre, following accession to the EU in 1995, immigration has become a factor that profoundly influences local identity. Open xenophobia and racism in Austria are the results of a surprisingly paralysed political discourse maintained by the centre-left parties, seemingly conceding the ground at present to extreme right-wing parties, like the Austrian Freedom Party. Inertia in the political landscape on local as well as on national levels is once again reflected in the circular relationship of present politics existing without moving away from the idyll of ‘the past’. The past is being constantly re-invented, using references to typically Viennese cultural signals that are also perceived as ‘typically Austrian’, too.

A good example of the political, propagandist conceptual use of ‘Old Vienna’ is the Viennese Freedom Party’s election campaign poster from 2012. In a blatantly obvious conflation of the National Socialist *Blut und Boden* (‘blood and soil’) discourse with the title of one of Johann Strauss’s most popular waltzes, ‘*Wiener Blut*’ (‘Viennese Blood’), the FPÖ’s top candidate, Hans Christian Strache, called for ‘More courage for our “Viennese blood”’,

and complemented the slogan with the caption: 'Too much of the foreign isn't good for anyone.' By ambiguously signalling an ideological relationship with a far-right election base, by evoking the 'blood and soil' metaphor and by simultaneously addressing the election base of traditionalists who would react emotionally to the mention of Strauss' music, the party's propagandist strategy heavily relies on the cyclical repetition of questionable political messages of the past and on the still prevalent emotive power of the *Heimat*-oriented image of *Alt Wien*.

The internet ~~Internet~~ has served as the representational space for counter-culture in this instance, when as the Austrian Anti-Fascist movement Movement (Antifa Austria) reacted to Strache's 2010 election campaign with an adaptation of Strache's campaign poster, which depicted characters from the aforementioned satirical TV series *Ein echter Wiener geht nicht unter*. The text reads:

The genuinely Viennese do not vote for Nazis.at.  
MUNDL [i.e. the main character's abbreviated name] (because Hatsche [i.e. H.C. Strache] is not quite right in the head)  
HE wants what WE want: SHUT UP ALREADY!  
Say no to HC Strache.

By returning to elements of critical discourse in the past, in this case in the context of political satire reaching back to images of the traditionally left-wing working-class which today forms a big part of the right-wing's election base, the Antifa Austria movement reclaims discursive space by resorting to another ideal past in their view – the time when class-consciousness could still be utilized to subvert the political discourse. Both examples support the notion that, even if extremely contrary political views are being expressed, they will still all resort to past discourses, signalling a cyclical understanding of political progress that has to take into account an element of public inertia.

It was only in 2013 that the Viennese public discourse, for the first time, adopted a less inert, more linear approach to local identity. Vienna Info, the city's official city marketing agency, introduced its new campaign of promoting urban Vienna as a space for fast movements and quick action. The new slogan reads 'Vienna: Now or Never', suggesting that eager tourists should make their way to the airport to visit the city now, before the window of opportunity closes. The series of city marketing posters also includes one where dancers of the Viennese State Opera Ballet Company are seen taking



a break on stage. It is complemented by the following text: ‘At this very moment the last tickets for the premiere are being sold at the Vienna State Opera. You should hurry up’.

It seems as if the *Gemütlichkeits*-discourse has been expanded by the idea that, in order to enjoy and take part in Vienna’s cultural offerings and leisurely lightness, you must be quick and secure a ticket, so you can relax and experience how the city transforms into a big, private, homely space – especially for you, the pleasure-seeking visitor. It is an invitation to paying guests from those parts of the world where time is money to become part of an experience of deceleration and a hedonistic life-style in a benevolent and welcoming urban setting. It is the staging of the urban space as private retreat, completely blocking out the Lefebvrian concept of linearity, ticking clocks, speed and excitement. The Austrian capital’s marketing campaigns are exclusively informed by the Vienna’s century century-old, circular identity discourse and the social rhythm of a decelerated 3/4 time. All that comes at the cost of a ‘real-time’ appreciation of lasting demographic changes and cultural paradigm shifts after 1945.

There is, however, a collective counter-cultural effort visible in the attempt to alter Vienna’s global image as Europe’s centre of high culture, architectural and natural beauty and elegance, and of safety. It is the so-called *Grind*-culture that attacks representations of *Gemütlichkeits*-inertia on several levels.

### Deconstructing *Gemütlichkeit*: The Counter-Culture of *Grind*

Opposed to the affirmative and at times increasingly outrageous political representation of Viennese *Gemütlichkeit* and *Heimat*, a strand of critical and satirical analysis has been pointing out the strong social tensions and the increasingly open anti-Semitism underneath the thin layer of music and cosiness. Parallel to the strand of the Viennese *Gemütlichkeit*, the topos of the so-called *Grindkultur* (gutter culture) has emerged from the deconstructivist attempts of the 1960s and 1970s. It represents another, and indeed, purer kind of spatial practice, where the empirical reality serves as a starting point for cultural opposition.

Based on a different notion of authenticity and popular tradition such as the Viennese *Volkslied* (popular song), a prolific production of music, literature and films has sprung up, all proposing the idea of a certain inertia and backwardness, but this time satirically charged up and full of dark spaces and desires, hinting at the subconscious landscapes of Sigmund Freud’s Vienna.

Critical counter-culture is drawing a picture that diverges from the smooth image of Vienna as it is presented at the New Year concert, at the concerts of the Vienna Boys' Choir or in the so-called *Wiener Klang* (Viennese sound) of the various symphony orchestras. This different and gloomy picture highlights a certain backwardness, stubbornness and dullness underneath the polished societal surfaces. Strange phenomena and archaic social practices that often originate in the imperial administration of the monarchy pervade films and novels. Outlaws, refuseniks and other figures are used to represent a Vienna that is essentially different from its prominent popular image and yet part of the space that 'forge[s] together [place construction and transformation] in a dialectal unity' (Merrifield, 1993: 520).

The *Grind* topos is unmistakably present in popular culture – such as for example in the TV series *Kottan ermittelt*, or in music with the *Neues Wiener Lied* (Ernst Molden, Der Nino aus Wien, Stefan Sterzinger, Die Strottern, Des Ano, *et. al.*). But it is also present in literature in the works of, for example, Elfriede Jelinek (above all *The Piano Teacher*, 1999 [1983]), Thomas Bernhard (*Holzfällen*, 1984) or in the works of contemporary authors such as Arno Geiger (*Es geht uns gut*, 2005) or Lilian Faschinger (*Stadt der Verlierer*, 2007). In this context, Vienna is depicted as an overtly inert city, full of hidden rituals and populated with freaks and distinctly inactive characters.

Crime novels are certainly the genre that uses this motif most. Various series based on anti-heroic investigators have emerged, especially during the past decade, many of them have also been adapted for TV and cinema. Prominent examples are the detectives "*Lemming*" created by Stefan Slupetzky, "*Bremer*" by Wolf Haas, "*Rockenschau*" by Manfred Rebhandl and "*Kosmak*" by Walter Leitner. Once again true to the dialectic understanding of spatial conceptions, it is safe to say that a new genre of trash literature using the counter-cultural notion of a gloomy, backward Vienna is blooming.

### The Image of Backwardness in (Popular) Culture

Austrian films are maybe the most obvious carriers of this image of backwardness and a gloomy melancholy that is of a similar quality as the 'autumnal melancholia' Claudio Magris has identified in connection with the Habsburg myth in Austrian literature. Many films that have been produced since 2000 deal with marginalized groups living in dark spots of the city. The movie *Nordrand* (1999) by Barbara Albert tells the story of five young persons with different backgrounds and was among the first films putting forward this

particular side of Vienna. Together with Antonin Svoboda, Jessica Hausner and Martin Gschlacht, Albert formed an independent production company, called 'coop 99', with the aim to act as a platform for young Austrian filmmakers. In their films about Vienna, the city is shown as a place where immigrants as well as the Viennese are living together in a state of standstill – trapped in alcoholism, petty-bourgeois conditions or violence. Actors like Georg Friedrich started to specialize in playing the roles of small minor criminals that were full of self-pity and aggression. In *Hundstage* (2001), a film by Ulrich Seidl, a mentally unstable woman constantly repeats top-ten lists of stars, sales numbers and other lists, in a verbal enactment of the perpetual movement of a merry-go-round. The only person in the film she can really attach to is an elderly aristocratic lady who seems to live in the exact same standstill as the maniac woman. There is no way out of this special 'Viennese' condition. A critic of the *New York Times* critic called this new Austrian film (which was quite successful in film festivals) 'feel-bad cinema' (Lim, 2006).

It seems telling that one of the most favourite filming locations is the Prater, the well-known late-nineteenth-century amusement park with the emblematic Ferris wheel, an entertainment area where peep-shows attract clients next to carousels for children. The wheel, as well as the carousels and merry-go-rounds, seem to accompany this discussion of urban Viennese inertia as topoi of simultaneous standstill within the process of moving.

The Prater is still very popular among the Viennese and among tourists, despite its distinctly shabby appearance. It is perhaps the only urban space in Vienna that truly reflects the passing of time and the generational changes of everyday life. At the same time it represents the true continuity of people's need for Dionysian enjoyment and festivals, which are, in Lefebvre's conceptualization of people's right to space, 'way[s] of celebrating the regular and cyclical rhythms of nature with which human life is intertwined' (Butler, 2012: 34).

The Viennese Prater is both: a vast urban nature resort with forests and meadows, little lakes and quiet clearings, and an amusement park with a century-old history as a dedicated leisure space and modern attractions like its own Madame Tussaud's next to the Ferris wheel. However, the official representation of Vienna excludes images of the Prater wherever possible, despite the amusement park's obvious recognition through the arts. The reason for this surprising omission of a culturally important space in the Viennese landscape is that the image of the 'Old Vienna' has to be a bright



7.1 Autodrom, Wiener Prater, 2012. Photo by Elisabeth Mayerhofer.

and shiny vision of the past, not a gloomy and shabby one. On the opposite side of that sort of city branding, Berlin, for example, is very much relying on the myth of shabbiness and creativity – ‘poor but sexy’, was the famous quote by mayor Mayor Klaus Wowereit in 2003.



7.2 Signs of Decay, Wiener Prater, 2012. Photo by Elisabeth Mayerhofer.

It was an attempt to clean up the Prater in order to establish a family-friendly historic entertainment park that brought the Viennese Town Hall's political agenda to light. For years, politicians had lobbied for a re-branding of the one space in the city that had hitherto been successfully claimed by its inhabitants and developed according to its users' needs and not by subjecting the area to urban development plans. In 2003, after five years of fruitless discussions, the City Council of Vienna commissioned the entertainment park planner Emanuel Mongon to develop a new concept for the Prater. According to the plans, the old merry-go-rounds of the 1970s and go-kart driving tracks should give way to reconstructions of historic carousels and entertainment facilities from the Prater's early days. This plan to restore a nineteenth-century past met with considerable opposition. After years of conflict with the well-organized union of carnies, a few buildings at the entrance were renewed, a tremendous amount of public money was spent, a vice-deputy mayor resigned and everything else stayed the same. Suffice it to say, the renovation plans were never really supported by the population who did not see the necessity of changing such a popular site.

The population had, this one time, exerted their right to the city, reacting to their perception of an empirical reality and against technocratic interventions by what Lefebvre would call practitioners of 'representations of space'. The absence of intellectual reflection and the reliance on direct experience can therefore result in a progressive collective decision, like maintaining a space that historically has belonged to the urban community for centuries. On the other hand, a complete absence of reflection or reaction on such direct experience can enhance the impact of politically questionable movements.

It is the core problem of Viennese inertia that it relies on precisely those dialectic outcomes when exerting a right to space and that it still informs and shapes the political discourse of the Second Republic. To date it is not yet clear whether Viennese inertia will actually have to be perceived in the future in a culturally pessimistic sense, reflecting Oswald Spengler's study *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (*The Decline of the West*, 1918) which contended that, as soon as a culture reaches a civilized status, decay sets in and ends in absolute stillness. Vienna's dominating 3/4 social rhythm could therefore be an expression of a prolonged period of decadence within the context of a dying Western culture. Or perhaps Viennese inertia will, on a more positive note, result in an increasingly strong and prominent counter-culture that puts more emphasis on the empirically real demographic and cultural situation of

the city, allowing for a productive use of the circular element within a linear trajectory towards the future.

## Conclusion

By examining various tropes of inertia in the Viennese context, especially social rhythm and the conflated discourses of *Gemütlichkeit* and *Heimat*, we have tried to elucidate how fast the flirtation with backwardness as a means for local identity-formation can turn into a conservative gesture which supports nationalist ideas. Using Lefebvre's concepts of spatial practice and rhythmanalysis, and his metaphor of a seashell for a city's ideal structure, a dialectical interpretation of space, place, and of the essentially untranslatable cultural topoi of *Heimat* and *Gemütlichkeit* has demonstrated that cultural references to the past may quickly serve as a discursive tool of exclusion – either by drawing lines of exclusion, as the extreme right is doing in Vienna, or by cementing mechanisms of marginalization.

Vienna's urban development since the seventeenth century has seen two caesuras: the first caesura was the end of ~~The the First~~ World War, for which Lefebvre's seashell metaphor can be used to describe how the imperial structure and imperial buildings prominently remained, whereas, in the absence of an imperial core, the political vacuum filled with conflicts about reclaiming the space. These clashes between the bourgeoisie and the working class were augmented by the conflicts between Christian nationalists against socialists and fascists. Viennese urbanization coincided with Austrian industrialization and the imperial 'urban shell' remained intact, with its 'soft core', the Viennese people, constantly changing in terms of demographic size and ideological directions. The second caesura came with the end of ~~The the Second~~ World War. Another bout of urbanization during the so-called *Wiederaufbau*, the phase of reconstitution, and a Viennese public political discourse devoted to continuity resulted in the curious dialectics of an ephemeral presence of history, technocratic capitalist urban development and a synchronicity of past and present. Since the beginning of the 1950s when crass urbanization started, and with the demographic changes resulting from increasing immigration in the 1960s and 1970s, Viennese urban rhythms have showed themselves to be dominated by an oscillation between acceleration and deceleration, highlighted by the particular prominence of the waltz, as a culturally defining rhythm in twentieth-century Vienna.

Reading the 3/4 time of the waltz as a very powerful ideological metaphor, the cyclical aspect of Viennese inertia has been extrapolated in connection with today's political landscape in Vienna and the urban identity. We have also showed that rhythm does not so much 'punctuate and animate' urban spaces in Vienna as it confuses its inhabitants to a certain degree by suggesting progress in regress. The metaphor of the monotonous merry-go-round is applied in several ways in the Viennese cultural context (the *Riesenrad*, the *Ringlgschbüü* in song and poetry, and more) and prevails as a fixture in urban local identity.

## Notes

- 1 Net migration to Austria saw an increase from an average of 7,200 in 1995 to 17,300 in 2000 to 33,000 in 2001, after Austria joined the European Union in 1995 (Statistik Austria, 2002).
- 2 'At the beginning of 2012, there were 971,000 foreign nationals resident in Austria (11.5% of the population), an increase of 43,000 individuals in comparison with 2011. This increase is attributable to a positive birth rate and migration balance among the resident population of foreign nationals in Austria in 2011 (less naturalizations). On average, there were some 1.569 million people living in Austria in 2011 with a migrant background (equivalent to 18.9% of the population). Of these, ca. 1.153 million belonged to the "first immigrant generation", i.e. they had been born outside Austria but had moved to this country. The remaining nearly 415,000 individuals were born in Austria as the children of immigrants born outside Austria (i.e. belonging to the "second immigrant generation")' (Statistik Austria, 2012).
- 3 This is known in musical theory as '*rubato*', a feature of musical dynamics requiring special artistic skills (Gutierrez, n.d.).
- 4 There is an abundance of literature on the term *Heimat* in the Austrian context and many of the studies thematize the reclaiming of space as a basic notion of a feeling of *Heimat* (see Utgaard, 2003: 40 and Vansant, 2001: 113).
- 5 Architect Wilhelm Stiassny has addressed this in his lectures (Tanaka, 2009: 37).



# 8

## Inertia and Ethical Urban Relations: The Living, the Dying and the Dead

Stephanie Hemelryk Donald

Flies and a smell and nobody noticed.

– *Dreams of a Life* (2011)

The face as the extreme precariousness of the other. Peace as awakens to the precariousness of the other.

– Emmanuel Levinas (qtd. in Sentilles, 2010: 526)

The premises of this chapter are, first, that the city is as much indebted to the dead as to the living and, second, that the inertia of the dead is – counterintuitively perhaps – generative of historical meaning, ethical deliberations and cultural renewal. Taking cues from the theologian Sarah Sentilles’s commentary on Levinas and the ethics of *looking at* and *looking after* the weakest in society, and the literary philosopher Robert Pogue Harrison’s commentary on death as both a debt and a responsibility to time (2003: 143), the following discussion aims to place the corpse at the centre of our consciousness of what it means to live in an ethical manner in the city. This is partly in order to train our attention on the urban precariousness of the living, revealed most poignantly through death, and partly to investigate the potency of acknowledging matter *through* its inertia (rather than in spite of it). This second premise is therefore an ontological claim on stillness, the most profound stillness that humanity can imagine or perform. This discussion draws on cinema, ficto-documentary and theatre to tell stories of death and

disposal in London, Paris and Senegal. In European post-colonial cities – Paris and London – the cases reveal the temporally extended marginalization of raced subjects before, during and after death. In a certain sense, photography understands this continuation of death through the transformation of matter and through the attention of the living to the dead. In his essay on the ‘still remains’ of Athens’ monuments, Jacques Derrida comments that there are three deaths on view, ‘three temporalities in the eyes of photography . . . the first before the shot, the second since the shot was taken, and the last later still’ (2010 [1996]: 27). We recall Don McCullin’s powerful photograph of a sleeping homeless man in the East End of London, the caption of which reads: ‘Irish homeless sleeping in the rain and waiting for death (which came)’ (McCullin, 2007: plate 8).

In his meditation on death and photography, Barthes views photographs as ‘wounds’, and describes the *punctum* – the detail that interrupts the *studium* of the image and triggers affect or deeper meaning-making – as ‘that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)’ (Barthes, 1982: 21, 27). The *studium* may indicate life, beauty and indeed aesthetic form, but the photograph will still capture an image of those who will or are about to die. The closer the perceived death is to the subject – or the farther the subject is from us in time and so the more likely they are to be dead as we observe the photograph – the more wounding the image might be. Sarah Sentilles’s theological reading (2010) of *Camera Lucida* specifies her insight that the face of death in the photograph, which Barthes perceived as the face of his own mortality as well as that of the subject in the image, also incurs obligation (a reading which Sentilles draws also from Levinas). Looking at the face of another involves taking ethical responsibility for the other. This implies that the subject of an image is not the object of the gaze, but is party to our gaze. It is mournful but active. We are in a relationship, one to another, even across the boundaries of sentience. To look is not an apolitical act; it is a public, energetic relationship, not a personal meditation.

Photography perhaps is modernity’s gift to the dead, but there is also much that it has taken away. Norbert Elias talks of ‘the withdrawal of the living from the moribund’ (1985: 29). The physical place of the dead in the modern city is subject to governance that privileges such withdrawal. Modernity has brought spatial segregation, enforced dispersal and sometimes multiple relocations. Cemeteries (dedicated burial centres, as opposed to the hallowed ground in and around local churches) were invented as disposal sites at places convenient to systems of modern urban planning. Meanwhile, Thomas Laqueur (2002)

points out that the global scale of the Nazi terror in the 1930s and 1940s caused families to be scattered worldwide and their remains, therefore, to be similarly dispersed. Protocols and geographies separate the dead from the living, remove the body to the morgue and from the morgue to the grave or the pauper's lot as quickly as possible to make space – presumably – for the next corpse (493,242 people died in England and Wales in 2010), and of course to keep the wetness of pestilential matter at bay. Such systems deliberately rupture the relations between the dead and the living, and were resisted by nineteenth-century city dwellers who still expected to be able to spend time with the remains of their loved ones. Grief needs not just an object, but a proximate one; Harrison reminds us that the worst fate for an Ancient was to be denied access to the corpse of a loved one (2003: 143). In London, parish mortuaries began to be erected after 1850, but they could not require that bodies be removed there until 1866, and only then if the body was infected and was in a one-room dwelling (Fisher, 2009). The innovation of mortuaries as a staging post to the undertaker and the cemetery, pre-empting the repulsion of putrefaction, was thus resisted for many decades, considered to be a premature separation that denied living beings the acknowledgement of the materiality of the human body. The removal of the corpse to the mortuary was all about health, of course, about removing the seeping odours of disease from the homes of the urban poor, but it was also symptomatic of a creeping disavowal of the dead amongst the living. We might extrapolate that the dead body in the house is a blockage to the smooth forward motion of urban production. One has to move around a corpse, one cannot order it to get up and go to work, it holds its stand against time even as time itself is writ large in the processes of putrefaction, more profoundly even than in the gentler ageing of a living body.

The preindustrial and pre-modern expectation that the dead inhabit a world on a continuum with the living is unworkable where space is tightly controlled and movement is global and frequent. Indeed, even when globally dispersed communities do lay claim to their dead, competition between dispersed or diasporic groups can be complicated. In Sydney in 2012 a furious debate raged over Chinese market gardens near Botany Bay. Developers wished to extend a cemetery into the historical gardens. Communities whose dead are lain in the cemetery, Greek and Jewish for example, supported the extension. The Chinese community opposed it as the development cut off access not only to a livelihood, but also to their labour and migration history and thus to their ancestors who worked the land for generations (La Perouse



8.1 'Cleaning up', *Dreams of a Life* (Morley, 2011).

Market Gardens, 2012). For the developer in this story, the issue is one of profit, but for the communities it is about the debt the living owe to the dead, how to access the dead and thus how best to serve that debt.

A recent British ficto-documentary film, *Dreams of a Life* (Morley, 2011), is based on the discovery by council workers of a female corpse in a small London apartment. The death and the corpse had gone unnoticed and unmourned for three years. The body had almost entirely decomposed, leaving only skeletal remains and a damp stain on the sofa and floor in the vague shape of a human being. The television was still on, and Christmas presents were scattered on the floor. The filmmaker, Carol Morley, was shocked that not only was the person a fairly young woman at the time of death (about 38 years old), but even after discovery no one came forward to claim her and to, as Harrison puts it, reunite her with the living and with her world through the processes of burial, grieving and memorialization (Morley, 2011; Harrison, 2003: 50). Morley's film therefore considers the precariousness of a human being's existence in society, before, during and after death. By laying out the results of her own investigation into the life of this woman, Joyce Carol Vincent (1965–2003), Morley's attention to the dead and the living Joyce contrasts with the abandonment that Joyce had experienced in the very heart of London over some period leading up to her death and in the years in which she lay alone in its wake. Morley demonstrates that the ties of proximity, friendship, sociality and love require constant attention if they are to be meaningful in a dense and fractured urban environment. In so doing, she retrieves Joyce's charisma and life force and challenges the viewer-as-city-dweller to answer for the loneliness of her death and her uninterred putrefaction.

Concerned with issues of anomie, race, domestic violence and the utter loneliness of death, *Dreams of a Life* exemplifies a cinema that seeks to unpack the associations between social relations and the shifting forms of material existence, including putrefaction. The inert corpse is a perversely dynamic indicator of the character of the social body. Indeed, the fact that a corpse transforms and liquefies – unless it is mummified or burned – creates the visceral *punctum* of the drama that is otherwise shorn of its key protagonist. Similarly, in Claire Denis's *I Can't Sleep* (*J'ai pas sommeil*, 2004), and Alain Gomis's *Today* (*Aujourd'hui*, 2011) the presence of the dead is also crucial to understanding the social worlds of the living. Both films are concerned with the marginal status of migrants to and from France, and relate the protagonists' liminality to the spectre of their extinguishment. In *Today*, the protagonist, Satché, is a returned migrant from France to Senegal, who wakes up one morning knowing he will die over the following night – that this is his final waking and his last day. He appears perfectly healthy, but he has been chosen. It is a particular cruelty to this modern man that the society to which he has returned from a sojourn in Paris belies its apparent urban modernity by wooing death. Death is thus made ritual and predictable, a death that gives a certainty to everyone else's fear. Satché is, however, separated from the beliefs underlying his own fate through his experience as a global migrant. The film traces his excruciating passage from acceptance to terror to impassioned resistance and eventually to sleep. The passage of the film is temporally equivalent to this last day – 'today' – Satché is cheered by the crowds and the politicians, mourned by his wife and alternately praised and criticized by friends and family. The energy that he initially derives from so much attention quickly becomes lassitude. In a fit of utter terror, his body crumples and the soundtrack enfolds him in a multitrack silence. He seeks solace from the man who will ritually wash his dead body, lying down to rehearse his own cleansing. The washer passes his hands over the body, turns his fingers in the ears and nostrils and sweeps up and down the legs and arms. The sequence reminds us that the shift between life and death cannot be represented by mere stillness. We watch the live man lying down to imagine what will happen to his corpse, to perhaps take some control of his own transition to inertia. But he has already shown us more about being inert as he walks through the streets, alive but separate, his present already behind him – but, as a returned migrant – indeed as a migrant *tout court* – his present is always already behind him. Death has simply accelerated and highlighted the anomaly of non-belonging.



8.2 'Remains of a life' *I Can't Sleep* (Denis, 1994).

In Claire Denis's *I Can't Sleep* (1994) the main protagonist is Camille, a French Mauritian sleepless in Paris. Camille lives by night and kills by day. The character is loosely based on the 1980s case of the transvestite serial killer and drug addict, Thierry Paulin. Paulin's first series of murders was committed with his lover, Jean-Thierry Mathurin; in the second rampage, he acted alone.<sup>1</sup> In the film Camille kills old women for money, and possibly for thrills. Their abandoned bodies lie rotting in their apartments, emitting flies and a smell waiting for someone to notice. The film is not, however, a murder mystery but an exploration of how people are marginalized spatially and emotionally in the context of the city. It is about how lines of flight and lines of sight intersect among those who are unusual protagonists in cinema: amoral drifters, the old and the dead of post-colonial France, post-socialist Europe. Denis frames the tale through a series of encounters between migrants to the city, whose existences touch briefly on the spaces occupied by the killer's victims. The hotel where Camille lives with his lover is also the place where a young Lithuanian migrant girl works and where she observes the nightlife of the district. As a fellow night dweller she notices Camille and shares his seeming ennui with the niceties of morality and human relations. After his arrest, she goes to his room, steals the money he has left from his latest murders and drives away from the city. We recall that she has also visited a large apartment filled with other migrants from the Baltic states, and there witnessed the discovery of a decomposing corpse in the same block. Her emotional disinterest in the discovery, and her cool ability to take fiscal advantage of Camille's arrest, match Camille's detachment at the scene of the crime.

Camille is lethargic and violent by turns. His mood and bearing may be described as on the cusp of a *petite mort*, visible in glimpses of excess through his voluptuous performance in cabaret, through sex, in violence and in the subsequent inertia of his relations with other people. In a dance with his mother at her birthday party, his draped body suggests an orgasmic engagement with the idea of dancing but no mindful relationship with his mother, to the extent that his brother (who will later tell a policeman that Camille was a stranger to him) cuts in. Camille's alternately languorous and aggressive movements shift his being from inert to hyper-energetic, without contradiction. He is as connected to the bodies of the women he murders as he is to the living people he moves among.

This undertow of inertia attaches to the central protagonists in all three films, and has specific impacts on pace and narrative projection. Things happen but the impetus for the action is undefined. It is almost as though people are sleepwalking into a fate prepared for them by cities that couldn't really give a damn. Overall, the notion of a coherent filmic narrative is replaced by random contiguity, snapshots of visual information and conflicting but unresolved perspectives. In other words, precariousness and uncertainty organizes the films in question. In Denis's work in particular, the amoral opportunism of the main protagonists is matched by the disorienting scene sequences that render judgement and knowing partial and incomplete.

Given the general association of cities with exuberance, mobility and change, these films are remarkable in their insistence on the intervention of inert matter into the social revelation of death, and thus the remaking of life. Satché's death-in-life is the *punctum* of *Today*, but it refers not only to his own imminent mortality but to that of all migrants, all those wandering cosmopolitans who are more or less cut out of the cities they inhabit even as they move through them. The *punctum* of the city is the inert and impassive faces of the corpses that no one notices, of the faces of those who are about to die, of the past and future, of the quick and the dead, in correspondence.

If inertia refers to still matter pregnant with potential and unexpended energy, then how is inertia made visible in cinema? The impression of life in death and death in life surfaces a deep mass of potentiality and potency. The part-documentary and part-imaginary *Dreams of a Life* is concerned to bring together fragments of a woman's life and to reinsert them into urban consciousness, and thereby to redeem her memory from the category of 'no one', into which she fell when no one (else) responded to either her



disappearance or to the news of the discovery of her remains. Carol Morley's work in researching Joyce Vincent's life, confronting her past and bringing the story to the screen, is an example of taking public responsibility, having seen 'the precariousness of the other' (Sentilles, 2010: 526), and requiring others to see it with her.

The facts available are as follows. Joyce Carol Vincent was born in London in 1965. She had four sisters. She was well brought up, and apparently lively and happy at primary school. Her mother died when Joyce was ten years old. Her father was apparently unreliable and did not give her emotional support. She herself died, presumably alone, in a small and barely furnished London council flat – social housing – above a shopping centre some time before Christmas 2003. Her remains were not discovered for the best part of three years, despite unpaid bills and reports of 'flies and a smell'. Her television was still on. When her name was announced in newspapers no one responded, and so Joyce herself became no one even as she became a cause célèbre of anonymity and social breakdown. It was only when Morley read of the case in a discarded newspaper (the accident of *punctum*) and made strenuous efforts to find out who her friends and relatives were that her story emerged. Or rather, fragments of her story emerged.

The resulting film comprises what Gregory Currie has classified in his definition of documentary as a mixture of *traces* and *testimony* (Currie, 1999). Traces are a direct link to the person or phenomenon in question. In Joyce's case, these include photographs that were found at the flat, a snippet of television footage of Nelson Mandela's first visit to London in 1990 in which Joyce – who was present at an event and came close to the man himself – turns to camera, and the sound of her voice on a demo tape recorded in a south London studio. Testimony is at one or several removes from the subject, and here includes faithful reconstructions, interviews, news-clippings and notes Morley made about her discoveries as she constructed a timeline for Joyce's life. There is also testimony to London itself, through maps and day and night shots of the area in which she died. The presence of London is crucial to the meaning of the film, both as a context for Joyce's life and death, and as a place in which – as Vanessa Redgrave narrates in Patrick Keillor's *Robinson in Ruins* – 'inertia, of the dead, the poor, the wounded, looks back at the city and asks for recognition' (2010). The film also includes *conjecture*, mainly in the form of dramatic sequences that pick up on clues from interviews and other testimonial material. Smokey Robinson's 'My Smile is Just a Frown' is a song that repeats throughout the film, drawing

on the sadness of the song itself and on Joyce's reported ambitions to be a soul singer. The two men in her life (the two who are interviewed, that is) both pour cold water on her singing ability, although other friends are much more positive. The song also hints at her mysterious inner life, and the denigrations she will receive later from violent men (who are not, of course, available for interview). Claire Denis uses the song 'Le Lien Défait' ('The broken bond') in a similarly evocative way in *I Can't Sleep*, and of the scene in which the song plays, Serge Walton has remarked '[i]n this extraordinarily moving and phenomenologically proximate scene, Camille exudes physical grace and intensity of feeling' (Walton, 2012). It is doubtful whether Thierry Paulin, the murderer on whom the film is loosely based, ever sang in a nightclub (although he may have wished to do so), but this scene is more about Camille's capacity to feel without empathy, and to project feeling without sharing it, than a representation of a performance that may or may not have occurred, but which otherwise helps to fill gaps, create unity, in documentary reconstruction. The philosopher Jeff Malpas has commented that seeking unity over time between consciousness and death is the prime work of a human being, since death is the only way of knowing ourselves to be human. Moreover, he notes that '[s]ince the unity that is at stake here is indeed a complex unity over time, it is also a unity that is able to tolerate a certain amount of disunity' (Malpas, 1998: 123). What is most distressing in Morley's film is that the disunity in Joyce's fragmented life story occludes any sense of wholeness, or even a sense of journeying towards a tolerable disunity. Perhaps she just did not have enough time? Her life did not come to a conclusion, it ended. The traces and testimonies – the ephemeral bits and bobs of personhood – are left behind, always incomplete because the person who gave them meaning, who in a sense completed them and vice versa, has gone. The narrative of a film, or a memorial, or a funeral service aims in part to remake the end into a completion. Poignantly, following Walton's observation on Camille's 'phenomenologically proximate' singing, it is only the imagined, reconstructive performance of Joyce's song that brings a despairing unity to her life before death.

Given the state of decomposition of Joyce's body, the forensic investigation concluded that she 'most probably' died from 'natural causes'. Joyce's remains were skeletal and are not shown in the film's reconstruction of the discovery. A dramatized sequence includes a shot of a stained floor in the vague shape of a body, the material trace of Joyce's remains. A journalist who covered the story in 2006 comments, '[i]t's a body melting into the carpet basically,

it's grim', and (in a fictional reconstruction) a death-scene clean-up worker in the scene advises his staff, '[i]f it's wet, and it's not yours, you can't take any risks'. This grimly practical advice echoes the advertisement texts of a clean-up service in London:

There are dozens of pathogens and diseases that can be transmitted through blood and bodily fluids during the crime scene clean-up process. . . . The accident site is thoroughly cleansed using the latest anti-viral and anti-bacterial cleaning chemicals. We will do steam cleaning and carpet cleaning to remove blood or other fluids. (CleanSafe Services, 2010)

Those who cleaned up Joyce's apartment were professional strangers, a fitting finale in a city where strangers are 'proximate' but not able to see each other's faces in a way that incurs true mutual obligation. The stain on a floor, a restaged *testimony* to Joyce's post-mortem fluidity, is also a *trace*. It refers to the actual stain, the trace of her materiality that the council workers discovered and the cleaning workers removed. It insists on her inert presence in the city even across the years in which she was unremembered and unsought. It provides the *punctum* in a film about her dreams of a life, and the dreams of Joyce's life, constructed by Morley's piecing together of the desires and dreams of a woman who may or may not have wanted to be a famous singer, but who certainly ended up dead and alone before she turned 40. It is not possible to forget the stain that a human body leaves behind, waiting to be found, inert but in motion, 'melting into the carpet', as decay proceeds. Sentilles notes that the *punctum* is filled with the intention of the viewer (i.e. one cannot say for certain it is 'this' or 'that'). Nonetheless, she remarks of Barthes that, when he silently regards the image of his dead mother, he 'provides a model of ethical viewing', wherein he discovers that a photograph is not a representation of reality (after all, she was alive when it was taken, and she is dead when he regards it) but a trace of the person he remembers. Most importantly, that trace is not 'refuse', and neither the person nor the trace of that person should be thrown away. The photo should be looked at, it should not be put away in a drawer and, here, the stain on the floor should be carefully reconstructed and beheld.

The challenge for the viewer, then, is to let the photograph remain mad . . . the viewer must close her eyes and confront her mortality, the mortality of the photographed subject, and the limits of her knowledge of the other. (Sentilles, 2010: 528)

Sentilles's conclusion, through Barthes and Levinas, is that our responsibility – for this argument our responsibility *as urban strangers* – is to both recognize the profound alterity of others, including those beyond our immediate circle of similarity, and to take responsibility for their life and their death. Our debt to death is collective, social and unremitting.

In all three films, the protagonists share the distinction of physical beauty which, paradoxically, is also a mark of their alterity. They are the quintessential beautiful strangers in the city, attractive but expendable for the city's larger purposes. This is relevant, perhaps, to understanding why they stand out; the city attracts and rewards beauty, up to a point. Their physical charisma is perversely enhanced by their proximity to mortality, their own in the case of Joyce and Satché, and that of other people in Camille's case. Joyce emerges from the ficto-documentary of her life as a woman who attracted others, but who found it difficult to link up the various strands of her life: her Guyanese mother and West Indian father, her adult relationships with inadequate men, her disparate, ethnically discrete friendship groups and the disjunction between her ambitions and her capacity to realize them. She does not seem to have known herself, nor can others claim to have really known her. But knowing is really just an indication of responsibility. Across the interviews that Morley conducts with those who knew her at various stages of her life (and who responded to Morley's advertisements for information), it appears that her white friends regarded Joyce as exotically beautiful and accepted that *as such* she would drift in and out of their lives. They did not keep track of their 'exotic' liminal acquaintance the way they presumably would with a person they recognized as solidly within their sphere. They looked at her face but saw physical beauty rather than the vulnerability for which they must remain responsible. Her black friends did not seem to do much better, although they are more critically aware of Joyce's problems with her mixed race identity, her class and her sense of the possible. It is also very clear that the two groups of friends did not interact. Nonetheless, their willingness to work with Morley on the film suggests that they do in fact wish to pay their debt to the dead, to see the 'precariousness of the other' (Sentilles, 2010: 526).

The lonely death of strangers is not uncommon, or rather the deaths of those whose passing is unremarked are a returning theme in urban life, but it is not acceptable in an ethical society. A search through any urban record will find many too-frequent examples – in Sydney, a man slumped over his kitchen table for eight months in Waterloo, a woman in Surry Hills

lying in a terrace house for eight years (Fife-Yeomans, 2011). Both these cases were of older people whose connection to the world was no longer sufficient for their family and neighbours to take account of their absence. But other examples reveal that the ingrained marginalization of particular ethnic groups by official social actors also prompts offences to the dead. In August 1986, a man collapsed and died on a London street in Lambeth. He had been jogging and died just outside the building where he lived. The police were called, made a cursory inspection of his flat and declared that he had no identifiable contacts, relatives, friends or workmates. He was cremated and his ashes scattered in a place marked for 'paupers of the parish', in this case a London borough council cemetery. But this man did have relatives and friends, and he did have a career and in the moments of his collapse and death he was nearly safely home. But he was a black man in the 1980s and this was not inconsequential to the officials' lack of interest, or at least to their presumption that no one would care. However, Alfred Fagon had hardly lived in obscurity. Born in Jamaica, he was one of the thousands of West Indians encouraged to migrate to Britain in the 1950s. He had worked for British Rail. He had been in the army, and had been their middleweight champion in 1962. He had also been a travelling calypso singer and a welder, but finally settled in Bristol and became a writer and actor. He arrived in London in 1970, performing at the ICA in Mustapha Matura's *Black Pieces*, and wrote and produced many of his own plays, including *Shakespeare Country* for the BBC (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2012). It was when he missed an appointment at the BBC that his agent became concerned and tried to find out where he was. Two weeks later, she discovered the truth. Alfred had died, his remains had been summarily disposed of and the police had not even bothered to look at the identity papers in his desk, or to look through the script by his bedside to work out how to search for those who would miss him. Now celebrated as one of Britain's key black playwrights, he has a memorial, a sculpted bust in a housing estate in St Paul's in Bristol, erected on the first anniversary of his death (Port Cities Bristol, n.d.). People walk past him every day. He is to some extent fixed in the urban landscape. School children learn about him in social studies. His public traces reside in the V&A Theatre and Performance Archive, in his published plays and poetry and in an award for writers of Caribbean and African descent made every year in his name (Alfred Fagon Award, 2012). His close friends and relatives doubtless hold many others. The current essay is just one more testimony to add to those that have proliferated since his death.



**8.3** Alfred Fagon Memorial statue at Grosvenor Road, Bristol. Sculptor: David G. Mutasa, erected by the Friends of Fagon committee, 29 August 1987. Photo by Steve Bevan. Courtesy of Canis Major Photography.

At this point one remembers that a filmmaker found out more about Joyce Carol Vincent than the police (or indeed than a private investigator hired by her sisters). Was she still black when they collected up her belongings and cleared away her remains? In 1986, the police saw a black man in his late forties, dead on the street, wearing his familiar dark green tracksuit, and they simply tidied him away. Did the same hold true for Joyce's skeleton, and the stain on the carpet? Or, if that is unfair, why was a photograph not placed in the newspapers beside her name? Alfred's tracksuit is conjecture. That is what he is wearing in one of the few available photographs in the archive. It is a monochrome image but I remember the colour from my own meetings with this lovely man, when he tried briefly to teach me how to jog (we met when he was a writer for Foco Novo and I was standing in as an administrative assistant). He ran all the way from Lambeth to Camberwell to collect me, but I was hopelessly slow, and we both gave up the project. The dark green was just a bit darker than the Australian green I know now, and darker too than the Rasta green in the Lion of Judah track pants you can buy online.

The police's negligence in August 1986 was foreseeable in 1975. Alfred wrote a play at that time which pre-empted his own story. *Death of a Black Man* (Fagon, 1999) concerns the death of the protagonist Shakie's father, a musician:

Shakie: 'I can remember when every white man have him believing he was the greatest white musician in England.'

....

Jackie: 'Your father is dead in Manchester. Dead! This is the last chance you will have to see his face before they bury him.'

Stumpie: 'Bury him? You mean burn him! There is no ground space left to bury poor people in England. That's one of the reasons Mr Powell wants to get black people out of England – they are short of burial space and the good book say that ten thousand of us shall fall.' (120)

Alfred's death and precipitous cremation resonates with Henri Lefebvre's question after Haussmann's modernization of Paris: who has/will have the right to the new city, or the global city? It places Joyce Vincent's loneliness in context too: who has the right to be remembered, to be safe, to leave a trace that will be first found, then seen and then not placed in the refuse but taken as a prompt for lasting recognition? Who has the right to press their claims upon the city's systems, to ask, even in death, for some proper attention after passing? In Denis's treatment of both Camille and the Lithuanian migrant in *I Can't Sleep*, and indeed all the other non-white or non-French characters in the film, there is no such settled belonging, only a sense of displacement and, as Adrian Martin says, of 'moving, travelling incessantly' (2006).

If Alfred *had* died at home, people who cared about him would have raised the alarm and his identity would have been discovered much sooner. He would have passed with dignity from death to grave. His right to the city was rooted in his home, not on the streets, which says rather a lot about the streets, blackness and London in the 1980s. But in that other London tragedy, in 2003, Joyce Vincent *did* die at home and this time it took three years to find her and no one raised the alarm. There is no obvious link between these two people, but there is a kind of dramatic montage that makes the stories match in action. Each death reveals clues about the other. Alfred was a successful and respected playwright. Joyce was still working out what she could do, and whether she could do anything well enough. Alfred was respected, Joyce (we surmise) was put-down, beaten and brutalized by a string of unnamed lovers. Indeed, everything we know about Joyce is speculative, even and not least the cause of death – as though she lay down and drifted into a dream of a life. There is however a literary connection, which would of course never have been made visible had Alfred not died as he did, and had Joyce's story not



been filmed. A female friend remarks of Joyce that everything and everyone came towards her, as though her tragedy was to seem alive but in fact to be the inert centre of attraction. One thinks of Alfred, and smiles. One thinks of Joyce, and cries. One could add that in the inertia of unfinished histories, there is the potential energy of connections and reclamation, of a memorial bust, or a film that can call us back to attention.

Inertia, then, indicates death or a state of indeterminacy between the quick and the dead, the alert and the asleep, flourishing and decay. The inert body transforms, slowly, into atrophy, mortification and disappearance. It is a trace of the living body and simultaneously part of the material and imagined world. In *Today* – which could also be seen as a pre-emptive ghost story – Satché's return from Paris to Senegal has already ghosted him, marking him with a patina of estrangement that indicates both his destiny and his uncertain status as global urban migrant. Why should he have returned? Why should he die? The film is not, however, about answers but rather about learning to walk through questions that become increasingly irrelevant as the day passes. He will not live through the next night, and he knows it. His whole community knows it. The audience must decide to know this also. The film begins with his waking in his mother's house where those who will grieve him wait to praise his qualities and criticize his faults. He sits and listens. He is subject and object of his own image, like a face in an old photograph, both dead and alive.

Inertia is generally understood to mean non-movement, non-vivacity and non-productivity. It is a term most often paired with 'matter', and the two words – descriptive and substantive – lend each other a deadly gravitas. This is not without challenge, however. In her assessment of the meaning of matter after Descartes ('the inertia of matter'), the phenomenologist Diana Coote notes that Cartesian thought describes matter as 'without qualities like colour or smell, . . . qualities attributed by thought rather than being intrinsic to matter' (Coote, 2010: 94). Coote's point is not to accept the Cartesian verdict but to resist it, and to reclaim materiality and 'nature's contingent exuberance' for matter. She comments that for Cartesians '[i]t is inert stuff emptied of all immanent vitality' (99), but for her analysis she seeks the 'internal generativity' of matter, and argues that this is best found through visual perception. Indeed, visual perception, as explored through cinema and photography, can configure and express the inertia lodged in urban life, in the nooks and crannies, the lonely flats and the pavements and the neat morgues of global cities.

Although Coote critiques the Cartesian dismissal of immanence in *matter*, she deploys the descriptor ‘inert’ without demur. Inertia is therefore, we must assume, the character of anything ‘emptied of all immanent vitality’, rather than the thing in itself. Later in the essay, Coote tells us that inertia is on a par with repetition – or rather is an emphatic form of repetition whereby there is no slippage between one event and the replay (Coote, 2010: 107); and, finally, that ‘an anti- or posthumanist philosophy might proceed by conceptualizing an embodied humanity enveloped in nature, rather than external to inert stuff it dominates’ (Coote, 2010: 112–13). Thus, the folds that enable and elicit bodily phenomena, and which allow connection with the materiality of the non-human world in which the body exists, are energizing and unendingly intricate, but inertia is not susceptible to this labyrinth of meaning.

Yet if the performance and imminence of death, so well expressed in *Today*, are folded within the emotion and materiality that the phenomenologist Coote recognizes as ‘enveloped in nature’, then is the inertia that death entails not also part of this natural envelopment? It may be easier to grasp this contention about inertia if we compare the peculiar status of emotion in relation to its *in absentia* persistence. The classical theorist Rei Terada argues that even when it is not present – when *apatheia* is dominant – we observe ‘the paradoxical thrill of affectlessness. Apatheia is crucial because it suggests the fundamental incoherence of conceiving non-emotional experience’ (Terada, 2001: 52). Indeed, the trajectory of *Today* might also be parsed through Terada’s reading of Thomas Keenan: “‘who speaks, reads, acts, takes responsibility or claims rights, if not me?’ Have “again and again” been answered “no one” and that “no one” is not a new name or placeholder for what used to be called the “subject” (Terada, 2001: 11). Satché, the walking dead man, is no longer entirely himself but nor is he anyone else. He is in the folds of departure and he embodies the immanence of inertia. He makes love to his wife as a last act of separation and closes his eyes while he looks on her sleeping back, before – pre-judged, deeply silent – he falls asleep, and ‘no one’ takes his place but everyone is linked to his passing. Inertia is that which absolutely resists otherness, change and sensation. Coote is correct that this is how inertia is generally understood. It is a working and familiar definition. However, it begs the question of where – if matter is immanent with vitality, and if that visual perception both commands and asserts that vitality – inertia lies in the flows of phenomenology. Can it really be external to everything else in the grip of nature’s exuberance? Surely, inertia is itself

indeterminate and susceptible to flow, and not entirely separated from the world in which it is perceived. Surely too, the inert is part of our being-in-common. As Jean-Luc Nancy argues, we cannot (or should not) embrace the myth of immortality for that entails losing the full range of our mortality but, rather, we must take on the certitude of death in order for the community (humanity) to be coexistent, reparable and whole (Nikolopoulou, 2007: 184).

A small boy in the American ghost thriller *The Sixth Sense* (1999) famously said, 'I see dead people'.<sup>2</sup> The conceit of that film was that a child, ontologically distinct from the closed world of adult perception, could perceive those who were similarly excluded (the dead, the brutalized and the forgotten), and help them seek justice for their passing. So, in this chapter, the cinematic and theatrical examples have been concerned to reclaim immanence for what is usually *seen or dismissed* as inert, and by so doing to forge a chain of responsibility across the boundaries of life and death. The motivation is twofold. First, to reclaim a place of remembrance and belonging for the dead in the global city and, second, to insist on the visibility of those, dead or alive, who are otherwise forgotten, whether through urban hierarchies and violence associated with those hierarchies (money, age, gender, caste, class, political power), or through a culture of strangers without perception. The premise of these rather lofty aims has been the call to attention from the philosophical theology of Levinas and Sentilles and the ethical viewing of Barthes. Outside fiction, to re-imagine the status of those outside of the field of perception is a political task, as well as a work of aesthetics and of associational thinking. An anthropologist might fairly suggest that the motivation is to return the global city to the local networks and folds of primitive pre-modern societies where death was represented through equivalence in life, as André Bazin described 'the mummy complex' in the plastic arts: 'the first Egyptian statue . . . was a mummy tanned and petrified in sodium' (Bazin, 1976 [1945]: 9). Yet the suggestion here is actually that the city itself is as inherently reliant on its own inertia as it is defined by its mobilities. The inert are a source of potency that contributes to the materiality, the memory and indeed the form of urban existence. Death is an individual stilling but the place of death in life is a collective responsibility that works backwards to render ethical attention to marginality. To return to Don McCullin's harrowing photograph of the homeless man in London's East End; he was waiting for death, it came and the ethical practice of McCullin's photograph rendered it part of the city's past, present and future.

**Note**

- 1 Accounts of the murders are available online. Discussion of the film, which is not an exact replication of events, emphasize Denis's place in post-colonial cinema in France. Cecile Tarr, for example, refers to the film's 'complex construction of alterity' (1997: 69).

# Part 3

## Slow Motion



# 9

## Urban Inertia and Dealing with the Disappeared in ~~Post-War~~ Beirut: *A Perfect Day* (2004) and *Here Comes the Rain* (2010)

Claire Launchbury

Une atmosphère de fin du monde régnait dans cette ville abandonnée.  
Je ne suis pas triste, pas de nostalgie possible.

— Raymond Depardon (2010)

Post civil-war Beirut inevitably retains some of the topographical scars of the conflict in borders and boundaries while being persistently reshaped according to demographic shifts in social economics as well as political and religious affiliations. It is also simultaneously witness to rapid and largely unregulated rebuilding. Samir Khalaf, in *Lebanon Adrift* (2012), recounts his daily commute from the regenerated chic urban district of Saifi Village across town to his office at the American University of Beirut in Hamra. Both bewitched and beguiled, Khalaf is struck by the massive physical and material transformations underway; how new socio-cultural spaces and territorial entities are invested with new meanings and, in a nod to Henri Lefebvre, how communities are recreating and reinventing their daily rhythms (Khalaf, 2012: 75–6). In the very few years that my own research has taken me to this extraordinary city, the exponential growth of high-rise blocks, the destruction of Ottoman-style



and Mandate-era villas alongside the ever fewer remaining traces of civil war ruins is astonishing. Beirut is very much a city on the move, a place of exhilarating uncertainty, of the unexpected and occasionally the insecure: the last thing one would seem to want to associate with the vibrant liveliness of contemporary Beirut is inertia.

Fifteen years of civil conflict in Lebanon, from 1975 until the uneasy peace brought about by the Taif Agreement in 1991, utterly wrecked the urban fabric of Beirut, destroyed the Lebanese economy, displaced thousands and killed an estimated 120,000 people. The amnesty of 1991 gave impunity to almost all actors in the fighting and the policy of ‘no victor, no vanquished’ led to unresolved silencing. For the former militia leaders who had become politicians, neither asking any questions nor having to give any answers in a judicial process of truth and reconciliation was both financially and politically expedient. There remains, then, an underlying stasis reinforced by state-led ‘collective’ amnesia. Combined with the attritive stillness of Beirut, where traffic jams grind down the mobility of the city, where pavements end due to building works or hit a major transport intersection leading the pedestrian to risk life and limb, the urban subject finds productivity thwarted and both desire and drive frustrated, worn down, inert. The tripartite register of the real, symbolic and imaginary leads merely to foreclosed encounters between city-subject and postmodern city-space: satisfaction and misery distributed according to the whims of late capitalism fill the urban backdrop with images and representations on giant billboards that inform a sense of self and reality that is contested as the language of the walls sets up commerce between images and the contemporary urban subject. Desire, delusion and the alienating false consciousness of consumption bespeak irreconcilable differences between a sense of self and reality. Homelessness is both visible (outside of the central district anyway) and figurative as ideal and city fail to coincide. If social practices and their politics prescribe an increased focus on successful intimate relationships, the forces of capitalism effectively dissolve social bonds into contractual exchanges of profit and loss. This has dramatic ramifications in a complicated society where sectarian affiliation potentially holds sway and underground economies in drugs and guns become implicated in issues of kinship and community. Furthermore, such contractual exchanges are thrown into tragic relief in the case of the disappeared, neither officially dead nor officially living, requiring those who remain to deal with the ambiguity of an ‘undead’ relative and having to take the decision to ‘kill’ them by legal declaration in order to release retained funds and property. In this chapter, I

want to examine cases of urban inertia in films which deal specifically with subjects affected by the 'disappeared' as well as examining the unsettling volatile stillness of unresolved conflict in a city torn between the abject of ruins and the sublime of the false promises of global capitalism whose giant tower blocks are erected over unmarked graves.

### Lebanon's Disappeared

The wars in Lebanon led to the disappearance of thousands: some were arrested and taken to *sub judice* detention centres, some killed then dumped in mass graves without identification, including in the course of the massacres at Sabra and Chatila in September 1982, or in other cases no trace exists at all. There is no consensus on the actual number of disappeared; a police report in 1991, the accuracy of which has since been disputed, calculated the number at 17,415, but a broad figure of 18,000 is generally agreed upon.<sup>1</sup> In the absence of a transitional justice programme, the fate of the disappeared lies, as with so many unresolved issues of the conflict, in a form of purgatorial limbo: families are unable to grieve properly, to tie up judicial loose ends and many still patiently await the return of their loved ones.<sup>2</sup>

*A Perfect Day* (2005) directed by Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige and *Here Comes the Rain (Chatti ya dini)* (2010) directed by Bahij Hojeij both throw the legacy of the civil war into relief by demonstrating how disappearance haunts contemporary urban experiences. In particular, they demonstrate how the stalling temporality of inertia is written into the waiting for the missing to return and is manifest in those who have returned in their struggle to comprehend their new environment. Both absence and return haunt an uneasy present in which neither past nor future can be envisaged. If cinematic cities are more than simple backdrops for narrative action since they themselves participate in the screenplay, the inertia of ~~postmodern~~ subjecthood finds very particular resonance and representation in films set in ~~post-war~~ Beirut (Lapsley, 2002 [1997]). The city, in spite of all its movement, becomes an inert, monolithic embodiment of paralysis in which any action seems thwarted or limited. Mark Westmoreland quotes filmmaker Ghassan Salhab, who describes Beirut as a crack in which daily life cannot escape from a perpetual present; the past is irretrievable, the future unavailable (Westmoreland, 2010: 191). Genuine progress is only ever a remote possibility and it becomes an urban scene in which ultimately the very act of breathing becomes threatened as the latency of the irretrievable past begins to strangle

and asphyxiate in its unspoken haunting of the present. For Malek and Claudia in *A Perfect Day*, Beirut has become a living nightmare: the film is composed of bleak scenes, often filmed after dark, shots of claustrophobic domestic space, traffic jams, the ubiquitous presence of advertising and portraits of martyrs are conflated with those of pop stars or fashion models. For Ramaz, on his return from his disappearance, his release seemingly as arbitrary as his capture, the city is overwhelmingly changed, hostile, terrifying and the cathartic relief of knowing is postponed to the film's end as the rain begins to fall over the urban skyline.

### Lebanon's Undead

Dominick LaCapra (2001: 10) reinforces the importance of distinguishing between absence and loss, and the distinction is of paramount importance in the context of the disappeared: If loss can be narrated and is capable of transformation or reconfiguration in the future, absence is a structural trauma that is both transhistorical and foundational and to which we are all subject. Theorist and practitioner Jalal Toufic (1993) introduces the potent figure of the vampire as symbolic of the undead (and absent) in ~~post-war~~ Lebanese culture. Like vampires, the ghostly manifestations of the war cannot bear reflection and responses to what he terms a 'surpassing disaster' but can only ever be mediated through the resurrection of imaginary memories of events that may or may not have occurred in the past. Paralleling Cathy Caruth's (1996) notion of unclaimed experience, the traumatic inscription reconfigures temporalities and the undead invoke the ruinous, the monstrous, the non-subject and the latent, suggesting that some form of pre-witnessing is necessary in order to mourn the invisible and the disappeared (Westmoreland, 2010: 191). This form of deep mourning is inherently violent because of its ambiguity; the extreme of the catastrophic does not allow for escape or resolution. The turn to the trace or object as mediator signifies what Caruth (1996: 5) attributes to the literary: something that defies, even as it claims, our understanding. The undead persist in their endless impact on lives shown in particular in relation to the everyday and the mundane. Westmoreland argues that it is the very uneventfulness that enables an audience to see catastrophic subjectivities (Westmoreland, 2010: 196). This space-time of the undead resonates with Beckettian aesthetics where the abject is brought to attention through nothing happening: '[the] undead are tragically displaced phantoms caught in a cycle of abject violence' (Westmoreland, 2010: 188).

The body of Beirut, according to Lina Khatib (2008: 61), comes to mirror the body of its inhabitants. But this is Toufic's mirror in which vampiric phantoms resist reflection, pointing not to a simple correspondence between ruined city and ruinous city-subjecthood but a performative irruption between identity and the urban. The ruins of the city and their image hovering between unreachable ideals and the violence of unaccounted-for mourning is populated by the subject who, as Rob Lapsley argues, is both 'always already begun and always already gone astray', having to 'find its way through the labyrinth its way created' (Lapsley, 2002 [1997]: 207). In the filmic texts under discussion, the camera opens up the optical unconscious to display the transversal dimension of the undead reflected in the urban inertia of dealing with the disappeared.

The wartime destruction wrought upon the city was witnessed by its citizens as if 'attending the projection of a film' (*'Nous voyons ce qui se passe comme si l'on assistait à la projection d'un film'*; Makhlouf, 1988: 36). Indeed, in 1980 the city became the backdrop for Volker Schlöndorff's filming of *Die Fälschung* (1981) as a ceasefire in the central district allowed the cameras into an otherwise prohibited zone to capture a simulacrum of the otherwise everyday of civil fighting.<sup>3</sup> The strange temporalities of destruction and reconstruction, of specular space inspiring a cinematic scopic drive, turned Beirut into 'a strange palimpsest where half-destroyed buildings and those which were half-built became confused so that it was not possible to distinguish between them: a strange city where, even in its architecture, life and death, ending and beginning, resembled each other' (Makhlouf, 1988: 36).<sup>4</sup> To exist in ~~post-war~~ Beirut, particularly as a woman who waits, is to exist in parenthesis, and the inertia here is contained within oppressive domestic spaces in both films. It is women, in particular, who suffer socially through being neither wife nor widow, single nor divorced. Unable to acquire passports for themselves or their children in the absence of a husband, such responsibility is deferred to a grandfather or uncle. The issues of gender and the resolution of the problems of the disappeared in Lebanon are problematically tied together. Such problems are also transmitted to subsequent generations. Children born during the conflict may have little or no recollection of the missing parent and their responses become imbued with the intermediary memory state of Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory (Hirsch, 1997) transmitted through photographs: a return to the rupture of suffering; or a form of orphaned memory which is haunted in an ultimately difficult and mostly unproductive engagement with the disappeared figure.

Lives are thus irrefutably altered by the non-present yet undead presence of the missing. Neither never fully gone nor never fully there, the disappeared remain as ghosts that continually resist being laid to rest.

In the following case studies the problem of the representation of the disappeared within the urban environment of Beirut is analysed. How does the suspension created by an absence of knowing, the undead status of the disappeared, the persistent haunting that they exert on the living, translate into the urban inertia of a superficially dynamic city that refuses to face its traumas? In ~~post-war~~ Lebanon, the women and children (this is predominantly the case) attempt to continue their lives both containing and resisting such an absence. In Beirut, moreover, the reconstructed urban fabric has been resurrected over the mass graves of the unknown dead, both haunting and halting the contemporary cityscape.

### ***A Perfect Day***

Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige are polyvalent artists and writers whose reflections on contemporary Lebanon are expressed in multiple media and texts. Their second feature film, *A Perfect Day*, draws on both their personal experience (the narrative is related to the experience of Joreige's uncle, who remains missing) and their intellectual concern with latency and their reading and writing of the urban 'fictions' of Beirut. In this film, the cityscape is read as a configuration of nostalgia for a glorious pre-war past combined with a supposedly collective fantasy of a new urban future depicted on the large billboards attached to building sites depicting dreams of luxury (often in ironic contrast to its immediate surroundings). These two temporal modalities of 'this has been' and 'this will be' leave the present suspended 'in a hysterical fashion, in a denial of the historicized inscription' (Hadjithomas and Joreige, 2003). It is precisely this closed-off present with all its latency of non-appearance, the repressed, obscure, undefined potential, the frozen lapse between the stimulus and its corresponding response that *A Perfect Day* attempts to harness. As the title suggests, the film is set within the strict timeframe of a day and there is no breaking-out from this surface temporal sequence except (and it is an important exception) in a second order temporality defined by an engagement with traces – newspaper articles, objects, clothes, or most tellingly an office which has remained undisturbed for many years. This is the latency which disrupts, halts and haunts the present. The plot, such as it is, concerns Malek and his mother who share a co-dependent but difficult

relationship. Together a decision has been made to sign the papers that officially declare the disappeared father dead, releasing his estate and perhaps releasing them from the tormenting hope (or fear) that he might one day return. Functioning not only as a poignant testimony to the reality of this experience for many families in Lebanon, it forms a larger-scale metaphor for the stasis imposed on ~~post-war~~ Beirut by the unresolved, unspoken and repressed events of the civil war. But the film takes us further than that. It is situated in a framework of references drawing upon literary and cinematic predecessors themselves concerned with this underlying latency and surface urban inertia.

The first scene of the film is a deliberate reference to the opening sequence of Marguerite Duras's *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959) directed by Alain Resnais, where the unnamed French woman is making love with her equally unnamed Japanese lover, following the opening depicting the explosion of the atom bomb at Bikini. The close-up shot is of skin, hands, freshness and desire yet the dialogue needs to take us somewhere else, alluding to a site of trauma beyond grasp but whose meaning nevertheless resonates. This impossibility of really seeing or knowing – ‘*Tu n’as rien vu à Hiroshima. Rien. – J’ai tout vu. Tout*’ (‘You saw *nothing* at Hiroshima. Nothing. – I saw *everything*. *Everything*’) – sets in train a discussion about the status of the traumatic event and, as Martin Crowley (2000: ~~58–59~~) states, a confrontation with the dilemmas of memory after trauma. These are negotiated by resorting to retrospective knowledge assured by visual evidence which is ultimately insufficient. This situation is reversed when Elle refers to her own traumatic experience (the disgrace of her affair with a German officer during the Occupation) and finds her inability to grasp her own past contrasted by assurances of its accessibility by her lover. Both the impossibility of their relationship and this axis of reversal are worked into the haunted narrative of *A Perfect Day*. The presence of the missing person is felt through the sense that there is an attempt to represent something but that this representation is always going to be inadequate. No possible means of fully grasping the unresolved past can be offered and the city becomes a metaphor of the inert stasis of this impossibility. Scenes of traffic jams, people standing around, advertising billboards, war ruins and dead-end streets index the immobility of a city unable to account for its past. As with Durassian narratives, enactment is impossible; instead there is an uncertainty, ‘a painful performance that cannot quite realize itself’ (Crowley, 2000: 64).

Having signed the papers, Malek and Claudia are shown dealing with the aftermath of the event in their very different ways. For Claudia, her

intention is to take on the guise of a widow, as though the official ‘death’ of the disappeared husband demands her outward demonstration of grief. She returns to her apartment and begins to pack away her husband’s clothes, having changed into a black blouse and skirt. She sits and waits and listens. Doors rattle, footsteps are heard and the curtains billow in the wind. Malek has other issues to sort out: his stalled relationship with Zeina and a persistent condition which means that whenever he stops moving he falls asleep. His health problem has been exacerbated in recent days by the need to revisit the notary to finalize the death of the father.

Malek’s literal inertia sees him fall asleep at the wheel of his car, at the building site he supervises and on the Corniche while children and joggers pass by. During a hospital appointment, his sleep apnea syndrome is diagnosed by a highly unconventional doctor who takes him through the wards outside to smoke a cigarette and she offers to take personal charge of his care. Smoking features throughout the film as Malek stops to offer cigarettes to men standing around. The notary himself is supposed to have given up smoking yet continues to do so through the signing of the papers. In the broadest sense, the asphyxiation, a lack of air symbolized by withered flowers in the notary’s office, establishes a pervasive sense of inertia through the inability of respiration. Smoking, and it is a pervasive health problem in Lebanon, also in this case represents the persistence of doing something knowingly harmful.

A sense of frustration is also embodied in Malek’s difficult, thwarted and borderline obsessive relationship with Zeina. He haunts her movements, finds her in a traffic jam, ignores her requests not to frequent the Rue Monot in the evening and, prompted by her refusal to take his calls, starts to make calls from other numbers. His pursuit of her leads to angry responses and ultimately her attraction to him only properly becoming manifest when he falls asleep. Unlike Malek, Zeina remains fully awake and seemingly without the strictures of haunting trauma. She embodies an alternative response to the aftermath of the civil war, a turn to Beirut’s lively nightlife, though this is called into question later in the film when it is realized she is looking at the world through lenses with a strong prescription. Her worldview is just as obscured, ultimately, as that of Malek or Claudia.

Scenes are intercut with images of the streets of Beirut and of billboards, commerce, people shopping and building work, suggesting the city on the move. Yet, instead, it points to what Jacques Rancière (2008: 93–114) refers



to as ‘*images intolérables*’ in which the temporal displacement between actuality and desired reality is transformed through facing the spectacle of these images. An alienation of spectacle, after Guy Debord, is the separation of the modern subject: transformed by the machine of spectacle into dead images, in front of us, against us (‘*transformée par la machine spectaculaire en images mortes, en face de nous, contre nous*’; Rancière, 2008: 96). The film, in common with other works by Hadjithomas and Joreige, is an essay on ways of seeing. The subjective disarray of Malek’s inability to truly encounter the other is manifest when he wears Zeina’s contact lenses. Although it is an attempt to see through her eyes, the vision is acutely blurred in an inversion of her corrective prescription as he continues his perilous drive across the city.

The perfect day which forms the timeframe closes in the early morning as Malek runs along the Corniche. However, the shot is a loop: he runs but gets nowhere. For Hadjithomas and Joreige, this is symbolic of the endless cycles of war, memory and amnesia that beset contemporary Beirut. Their refusal to acknowledge the civil wars as a closed parenthesis without consequences for the present is expressed through representations of latency. As much an attitude as an aesthetic strategy, latency is both non-apparent existence and the temporal gap between stimulus and response:

Latency also evokes what is often felt in Beirut, in face of the dominant amnesia prevailing since the end of the war, in face of this strange paralysis that pervades the city, in face of this violent desire to place things between parentheses – to censure oneself. (Hadjithomas and Joreige, 2003: n.p.)

During the periods of violence, the city was divided along the green line which ran north to south along the Rue de Damas. The ideological separation between Christian East and Muslim West met at this dangerous nowhere zone where plants began to grow through the tarmac as the city was utterly halted. *A Perfect Day* shows the city in response to this form of inertia in its attempts to offer representational strategies of the undead, the inconclusive fate of the disappeared, the latent conflict that lies dormant as the film intervenes in representations of an everyday paralysed by unresolved memories and haunted by their ghosts. Claudia is frozen in her own state of suspended animation and Malek, unable to find any meaning, stops moving and sleeps. As it plays with the undead, the film meditates on the urban uncanny, on the field of the frightening which embraces uncertainty over whether something is alive or dead.

### ***Here Comes the Rain (Chatti ya dini)***

If Malek and Claudia's inertia is compounded by the absence of resolution, in *Here Comes the Rain* the opposite occurs as one of the disappeared is released and moves back into a transformed city and domestic space. The film goes further than simply depicting the fictional narrative, as its opening scene and subsequent interpolations integrate the traces of the true story of the journalist, Nayfeh Najjar. Represented in monochrome scenes, she is shown typing letters to newspapers and, in particular, a government minister, petitioning the authorities to release her teenage son kidnapped in 1984. Her actions followed the release of the same minister's daughter following the hijack of a plane at Beirut airport on 23 December 1984. She was, according to Makhoul, 'the first victim of the relatives of the disappeared' (*la première victime des parents de disparus*), the haunting idea of her son's torture amplifying the sense of abandonment (her husband had been executed) which forms the anguish of suspension, of those who remain being held hostage themselves to some extent (Makhoul, 1988: 60–61).<sup>5</sup> The ten-month period between the abduction and her suicide by poisoning in December of the same year both parallels the temporal period of the film and works to structure it as interpolated scenes of her typing and, in the last, being photographed break through the central narrative.

Following Ramez's release, which seems to be as arbitrary as his capture, he is met by his wife, Marie, who fails to recognize him. His return is unsettling from the outset as he has to contend with his own traumatic fallout in nightmares and as his family readjusts around him. Ramez's main activity in life, perhaps in response to being tortured by suffocation with a bag over his head, is to collect paper bags obsessively. Classified by size and usage, his most valuable and beautiful ones are kept in a suitcase under the bed. He is first led outside to confront the strangeness of the ~~post-war~~ cityscape to fulfil the mission given to him by a fellow prisoner to inform his wife, Fatima, that he is still alive. The city is alive with building work on huge high-rise residential blocks and Ramez falters in astonishment at pedestrian traffic lights located on the old demarcation line. Again, we see billboards that advertise the joys of a life to be purchased and he rests at an intersection in the middle of traffic seemingly immune to the noise and movement around him. In a second city sequence, Ramez walks around the area above Square des Martyrs by the ruins of the St Vincent de Paul church and the shell of

a former cinema affectionately known as ‘The Egg’, the open space now replacing what had been the central transport and shopping hub of the pre-war city. Inertia exists in the lack of urban comprehension experienced by Ramez, enacted through a series of events that demonstrate his inability to readjust. It is also evident in the stalled existence of Zeinab, who awaits the return of her husband Khalil, kidnapped over 20 years ago. Both Zeinab and Marie experience the financial and legal difficulties of disappearance and return, but it is the chance encounter between Zeinab and Ramez that offers a narrative drive towards some form of mutual resolution. Taking fright and hiding in the transitory space of a stairwell, Ramez attracts the attention of Zeinab, forever on the alert, and she steps out to verify if he is her husband returned. Her desire for contact with Khalil via the confused and frightened Ramez permits him, in turn, to communicate something that he cannot with Marie and his children. Through this vicarious turn in the plot, until the final turning point of the screenplay, both Ramez and Zeinab emerge, talk and hope. A chaste affair that reaches its apogee in a boat trip off the Corniche, the city here is absent from shot as they sail on the blue of the Mediterranean foreshortened only by an attack of Ramez’s respiratory illness. It is only on his deathbed that Ramez tells Zeinab that he knew her husband and that he had died within one year of captivity. The rain of grief which follows closes the film.

In a similar way to *A Perfect Day*, the effects of disappearance on the subsequent generation are portrayed. Nadia, a talented daughter, is desperate to study at the Paris Conservatoire but fails because her application arrives too late. Elie, her brother, is rebellious and distant, and gains a promotion but equally gets involved in a fight about being trapped in Lebanon with no possibility of escape. These generational responses mark a sense of stasis. Escape can also be sought in the lively nightlife of Beirut, though it is only ever fleeting and once the hangover clears the unremitting cycle begins again. The children of the disappeared (and the reappeared) are all disturbed but the responses vary from indifference to mocking. Part of the beauty of Hojeij’s film is in its attempt to animate the difficulties of the everyday in ~~post-war~~ Lebanon. The gradual acceptance of the returned father and husband together with his slow reintegration helps to heal deeper, pre-existing familial wounds. Yet, just as Malek can never fully assimilate his subjectivity with his desired Zeina, the resolution – such as it is – offered by Ramez’s return plays on the latency of Hadjithomas and Joreige’s theory.

## Conclusion

These films, while presenting the inertia of ~~post-war~~ Beirut, challenge the image of the city as vibrant, energetic metropolis not by refuting it as such, but – in accordance with what Westmoreland (2009: 52) has termed post-Orientalist aesthetics – by inserting tensions that work to disrupt. These disappearances and their representations differ greatly from the mass publicity that was given to Western hostages during the war, even if many non-Westerners were taken at the same time. A film by Baghdadi Maroun entitled *Hors la vie* (*Out of life*, 1991) depicts the kidnap of a French photojournalist, Patrick Perrault (a character loosely based on Roger Auque) and his psychological torment at the hands of his capturers. As much a commentary on French post-colonial legacies in Lebanon, the film makes an important contribution to depicting fragile masculinities in a wartime context. The end of the film is demonstrative; having been freed and returned to Paris, Patrick leaves a restaurant table in order to phone one of his former guards, establishing the heterotopic space of telephonic communication. As the phone rings unanswered the camera pans over the abandoned kitchen, the bathrooms and bedrooms requisitioned as cells before dissolving to a car driving through the city (along the green line). Apart from the sense of the car moving there are no other traces of life, just ruins, and the journey is only heading nowhere, towards the sea (it is in fact a repeat of the same scene taken when Perrault is taken from one holding place to another). These repetitive tracking shots (and those at the end of *A Perfect Day*) represent the cyclical return of trauma and ultimately of the futility of trying to escape the surpassing disaster.

The issue of the disappeared also appears in a compelling BBC documentary entitled *Suspended Dreams* (1991), made shortly after the end of the war, alongside the strangeness of reconciliation as two former fighters from different sides join forces in a business repairing and rebuilding the ruins they once created. These are citizens who feel bombarded (their own term) by the intrusion of advertising on the remains of the cityscape and express concern for the environmental problems created by the burial of toxic waste. More tellingly, the ‘real’ pollution is defined as that which is changing people: the assault on memory and culture has led to fragmentation as the private company rebuilding the destroyed central district have plans offering outer form but no inner substance. The always-frustrated desire is the most difficult to achieve; to become whole.

Very different readings of the city of Beirut are offered in these films. But both, I suggest, engage with the sense of urban inertia that lies beneath the surface of the ~~post-war~~ cityscape. The disappeared and the returned, the not-quite-gone and the never-fully-returned, bespeak a very real sense of continued paralysis in ~~post-war~~ Lebanon. The disfiguration of the city is manifest through ruins, rebuilding and advertising, but it is through cinema that the opportunity to present the complex identity of Beirut through the intersections of representations across time and space is possible. A temporal disjuncture will always permeate the urban fabric as buildings rise and ancient ruins are uncovered; as the ruined, bullet-riddled buildings make way for reconstruction, the place of memory with its entire complicated and traumatic vicissitudes remains the only source of representation.

A city once literally split remains psychologically scarred along its old green line. Traces of the reduced urban geographies are only slowly breaking down their boundaries. The haunting spectre of non-reflected, undead and unreliable witnesses to trauma remains operative through its ability to ground, to stall and to foreclose encounters with both past and future. Memory, and moreover, imagined memory takes centre stage as the representative model in contemporary aesthetics in the absence of secure traces. However, it is perhaps through cinema that some sense of propelling movement to inert stasis might find some hope. Lina Khatib notes that while ~~post-war~~ construction was taking place 'Lebanese cinema remained stubbornly focused on the devastated image of Beirut – graphically and symbolically' (Khatib, 2008: 58) and was one of the only places where the ugly reality of war was confronted. In the complex and unsteady ~~post-war~~ climate, it is cinema, not without irony, that can best depict the inertia of not confronting your ghosts.

## Notes

- 1 UMAM Documentation and Research, Amnesty International, Act for the Disappeared, Support of Lebanese in Detention and Exile etc.
- 2 In the absence of state-led action, civil projects undertaken by non-governmental organizations such as UMAM Documentation and Research and human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Act for the Disappeared are trying to keep the unknown fate of these missing citizens alive in contemporary discourse. This can be acknowledged as part of the wider project to counter state-led amnesia that refuses to acknowledge the traumatic legacy of the recent past. UMAM's project *Missing*, for example, is an ongoing photographic project in which photos of the missing are exhibited all over Lebanon, organized in collaboration with the

- Committee of the Relatives of the Kidnapped and Missing in Lebanon, Support of the Lebanese in Detention and Exile and the Committee of the Families of Lebanese Detainees in Syria.
- 3 Randal Chahal Sabbag's documentary *Nos guerres imprudentes* (1995) skilfully juxtaposes an observation that the war was some sort of simulacrum with Schlöndorff's filming and then cuts to a still shot of the 'real' image of a body in the same area.
  - 4 '*Alors que les ravages ne cessent de changer le visage de Beyrouth, les habitants s'affairent à reconstruire: étrange palimpseste où les immeubles à moitié détruits et ceux à moitié construits se confondent sans que l'on puisse les différencier distinctement: étrange ville où, même dans l'architecture, mort et vie, fin et début se ressemblent*' (Makhlouf, 1988: 36).
  - 5 The letter to Joseph Al-Hachem published in *As-Safir* 38 (10–24 Dec 1984), p. 7 is also included in Makhlouf as an appendix (Makhlouf, 1988: 189). (bibliographic details for *As-Safir* publication needed?)

# 10

## Reflexive Stasis, Scale Reversal and the Myth of Modern Cinema

Lúcia Nagib

In this chapter, inertia, the city and globalized cinephilia will provide a privileged ground for the re-evaluation of the classical-modern-~~postmodern~~ categorization as applied to cinema. In order to examine this issue, I will analyse the stylistic figures of reflexive stasis and scale reversal as observed in three interrelated films, set in Portugal: *The State of Things* (Wim Wenders, 1982), *Foreign Land* (Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas, 1995) and *Mysteries of Lisbon* (Raúl Ruiz, 2010). In these films, the city is the place where characters lose their bearings, names and identities, and where vicious circles, mirrors, replicas and *mise en abyme* bring the vertiginous movement that characterized the ~~Modernist~~ city of 1920s cinema to a halt. Curiously, too, it is the place where so-called ~~postmodern~~ aesthetics finally find an ideal home in self-ironical tales that expose the film medium's narrative shortcomings. Intermedial devices, whether still photographs or a cardboard cut-out theatre, are then resorted to in order to turn a larger-than-life reality into framed, static and manageable narrative miniatures. The scaled-down real, however, turns out to be a disappointing simulacrum, an ersatz memory that unveils the illusory character of cosmopolitan teleology. Permanently thwarting historical progression, Lisbon and Sintra, in these films, are the 'oxymodern' cities par excellence, where state-of-the-art technologies of film and associated media (photography, sound recording, even computing) become stale at their very birth (*The State of Things*); colonial relations inform contemporary



neoliberalism (*Foreign Land*); and an avant-gardist serial film exposes its stilted nineteenth-century theatricality (*Mysteries of Lisbon*).

In my approach, I will start by examining the intertwined and transnational genesis that resulted, in these films, in three correlated but very different visions of the end of history and of storytelling, typical of ~~postmodern~~ aesthetics. I will move on to consider intermedia miniaturism as an attempt to stop time within movement, an equation that inevitably brings to mind the Deleuzian movement-time binary, which I will revisit in an attempt to disentangle it from the classical-modern opposition. I will conclude by proposing reflexive stasis and scale reversal as the common denominator across all modern projects; perhaps a more advantageous model than that of modernity when it comes to signifying artistic and political values, as well as evaluating the role of the city in recent transnational cinema.

### Portugal, Interruption and Globalized Cinephilia

Resorting to cinephilia as a means to compensate for creative stagnation is normally understood as typical of ~~postmodern~~ cinema, and indeed the Portugal connection in focus here harks back to a period that saw a wave of revisionism in cinema worldwide. Portugal is famous for its highly original and uncompromising auteurist cinema. Most remarkably, it is a forerunner and faithful devotee of what is known in our day as 'slow cinema'. Cinephilia has put down strong roots in its soil and generated a culture of quality over quantity that over the years has contributed to the work of some of world cinema's giants, including those by the oldest filmmaker in history, Manoel de Oliveira, still active at 104 years of age; the self-performing multi-talented auteur João César Monteiro; and Jacques Rancière's darling, Pedro Costa. This combination of creative freedom, cinephilia and slow-cinema tradition was certainly the main attraction for the four film directors in focus here, Raúl Ruiz, Wim Wenders, Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas. Despite coming from disparate generations, locations and cultural backgrounds, at turning points in their careers they all chose to try their hand in Portugal as a kind of safe haven for the recalibration of their creative momentum. The films they produced there can be seen as some sort of 'Portuguese interlude', as the directors attempted to gain distance from difficult situations at home or at their current workplaces and devote themselves to undisturbed experimentation.

The resulting films were all to do with the anxiety (or ironical realization) of doom and death: the death of cinema, in Wenders; the end of the European colonial empire, in Ruiz; and the failure of post-colonial reconciliation, in Salles and Thomas. It was Ruiz who in 1981, with *The Territory* – an unpretentious, low-budget film counted today among the director's 'rarities' – inaugurated the trend of the Portuguese interlude, which then cascaded down in a chain reaction through his peers, fuelled by transnational cinephilia. Sadly deceased in 2011, Ruiz was a Chilean exile living in France since the mid-1970s, for whom Portugal was an escape within an escape, providing the ideal setting for his radically independent as well as prolific cinematic production. The first of at least ten films shot in Portugal, *The Territory*'s title refers to some undefined place in Europe, nominally France, but in reality the woods around Sintra. The thin, absurdist plot is about a disharmonious group of vaguely-defined American tourists (including a few with French accents) who go hiking under the leadership of a grumpy guide. The latter soon disappears, leaving the group stranded and finally engaged in cannibalism. A Buñuelian allegory of Euro-American social stagnation, *The Territory* would probably have been forgotten, were it not at the origin of a legendary transnational Portuguese cinephile trend.

Parallel to this, and signalling the beginning of a strongly recessive current, Hollywood had become, from the late 1970s, awash with remakes and sequels that recycled both homemade and foreign classics. In Europe and elsewhere the end of the revolutionary new waves prompted filmmakers to look back on film history in search of raw material. An early adopter of this tendency was Wim Wenders, the wunderkind of the German New Wave in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1978, at Francis Ford Coppola's invitation, Wenders left a stagnant scene in his German homeland for the USA in order to engage with the nostalgic wave that both reassessed canonical Hollywood genres and reflected on his generation's creative downturn. Granted, the new environment did not mean any radical departure from Wenders's habitual filmmaking style, littered with references to so-called classical Hollywood cinema and American culture in general. But his acceptance of the offer to shoot a film noir in Hollywood placed him, for the first time, at the core of the classical-modern cinema conundrum.

The plan was not a straightforward remake, but a complicated reassessment of the crime genre through the adaptation of Joe Gores's fictional biography of Dashiell Hammett, the private eye turned detective writer who bequeathed

to genre cinema one of its most iconic characters, Sam Spade, the protagonist of *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941). Unfortunately, the first version reportedly shot by Wenders in his usual self-reflexive, realist style on location in San Francisco – though not in black-and-white as he had originally intended – seems to have been lost or destroyed. What remains is a disastrous second version, entirely re-shot with a different cast in Coppola's Zoetrope studios, that could perhaps be described as an involuntary caricature of film noir that prefigures the postmodern icon Tarantino by a decade – minus the latter's humour. Wenders's four-year misadventure in Hollywood was not entirely wasted time, however, as he managed to produce two independent films in an attempt to set the record straight about his relationship with Coppola and Hollywood: *Reverse Angle* (1982) and the film in focus here, *The State of Things*.

As the legend goes, in 1981, Wenders, on one of his trips between Europe and the USA – where *Hammett* had stalled – stopped over in Sintra in order to help Raúl Ruiz with some footage leftovers, so he could finish his underfunded *The Territory*. Impressed by the rushes and the relaxed atmosphere on the set of Ruiz's film, Wenders reportedly imposed as a condition for his donation that the whole cast and crew of *The Territory* would stay on in Portugal to work in a film of his own, which he started to write on the spot. Thus began *The State of Things*, at its origins a kind of sequel to or meta-commentary on *The Territory*. The title of the film, however, is one that was part of Wenders's repertoire since 1972, when he was planning to shoot a 'totally phenomenological film... something that was purely descriptive' (Wenders, 2001: 197). As Schütte suggests (Wenders, 2001: 197), this had to do with a Wendersian obsession with the idea of stagnation and false movement that appears in the title of one his earlier films, *Falsche Bewegung* (*The Wrong Move*, 1975).

In *The State of Things*, stasis multiplies in *mise en abyme*, in retro black-and-white in the hands of *nouvelle vague* cinematographer Henri Alekan. The film starts by rendering a remake of Roger Corman's *The Day the World Ended* (1959) under the title of *The Survivors*, Corman being a co-producer of *The Territory* who also makes a cameo appearance in *The State of Things*. It then switches the focus onto the cast and crew involved in the shoot of this remake, brought to a halt for lack of raw material, just as had happened with *The Territory* in reality. The rest of the film revolves around the characters' endless waiting for the American producer – named Gordon in a tongue-in-cheek allusion to Beckett's *Godot* – to come to their rescue with cash. Actors

and technicians kill time in solitary activities in their hotel in Sintra – a partial ruin half-submerged in the sea – visiting a morose Lisbon from time to time for a change. Meanwhile, the director, Fritz Munro – so named in honour of both Fritz Lang and Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau – travels back to Hollywood in search of Gordon, where both finally meet their death.

As for *Foreign Land*, it is a Brazilian-Portuguese co-production, whose executive producer, António da Cunha Telles, was also behind a number of Ruiz's films as well as other international art films, including the Portuguese films by Brazil's most iconic filmmaker, Glauber Rocha. It was Wenders, however, who offered Salles and Thomas – faced with a disastrous newly-elected neoliberal government in their home country, Brazil, which had brought film production to a complete halt in the early 1990s – the ideal way out. As I have explained elsewhere (Nagib, 2010), the Salles brothers, and Walter in particular, are self-confessed admirers of Wenders (Araujo, 2002: 419). Salles's kinship with the German director can be easily observed in his interest in aimless travellers from the beginning of his career up to his latest adaptation of Jack Kerouac's classic *On the Road* (2012), all reminiscent of the characters in Wenders's 1970s films, such as *The Kings of the Road* (*Im Lauf der Zeit*, 1976) and *Alice in the Cities* (*Alice in den Städten*, 1974). In *Foreign Land*, the choice to shoot in black-and-white, though primarily due to economic concerns, is no less tributary to Wenders's avowed preference for this stock in his early films. 'Life is in colour, but black-and-white is more realistic', declares Joe the cameraman, played by American B-film director Samuel Fuller, in *The State of Things*, a phrase that Wenders himself enjoyed repeating in his interviews. And of course *The State of Things* is a sibling of *Foreign Land* through its Portuguese settings, and it is no coincidence that Wenders was again exercising his penchant for independent filmmaking in Portugal with *Lisbon Story* in 1994, at the time when Salles, Thomas and their team were over there working on *Foreign Land* (see Thomas's comments in this respect in Araujo, 2002: 485). The film focuses on Brazilian migrants in Lisbon, trying to make ends meet through dubious jobs, including drugs and trafficking precious stones. There, they meet their African post-colonial counterparts, with whom they share the degrading situation of under-employment and illegal status, whilst Portugal itself is portrayed as a European outcast on the continent's periphery. The most conventionally narrative film of the three in focus here, it is nonetheless a result of the ~~postmodern~~ trend insofar as it is a collection of citations of other films and artworks – Orson Welles, John Huston, Werner Herzog, Jean-Luc Godard and a plethora of

literary sources including Fernando Pessoa, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and William Shakespeare. Moreover, it demonstrates Portugal's enduring attraction for filmmakers engaged with cinematic innovation, which would continue unabated until 2010 with Raúl Ruiz's best-ever film, *Mysteries of Lisbon*.

Providing a magnificent closure to a cinephiliac chain he himself had initiated two decades earlier, *Mysteries of Lisbon* is a monumental piece of filmmaking, stretching for over four hours as a feature film and at least six hours in its original format as a TV series. *Mise en abyme* is the rule in Carlos Saboga's masterly adaptation of Camilo Castelo Branco's romantic Portuguese novel in three volumes, in which interconnected stories multiply wide and deep across generations, in the typically inflatable serial style. The film is a tale of moral decadence, involving a parasitical bourgeoisie living out of colonial plundering, and repentant libertines disguised as mysterious clergymen. With its intermedial virtuosity and polyphonic narrative style, *Mysteries of Lisbon* joins the other two films in providing the means to reconsider, identify the limitations of and overcome the tripartite division of film history into classical, modern and ~~postmodern~~.

### Scale Reversal and Reflexive Stasis

I will now focus on the characterization of urban Portugal through Lisbon and Sintra in the three films in question. In them, the city is a far cry from the combination of crowds, machinery and unstoppable movement at the core of modernist urban films, as epitomized by *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (*Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, Walter Rutmann, 1927), *Man with a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929) or *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927). Instead, Lisbon and Sintra seem to have been chosen precisely to enable representation of the city through an iconography of stagnation, desertification and ruin, rather than industrial dynamism.

The main setting in *The State of Things* is a monumental, deserted hotel, half-sunk into the sea, in reality the Hotel Arribas, on the Sintra seashore. Though now entirely restored and brought back to its original glory, at the time of the shoot its courtyard, including a magnificent ~~100m~~ swimming pool, was half-submerged in the Atlantic. After stumbling upon this extravagant semi-ruin in Sintra, Wenders is said to have immediately decided to shoot his next film there (Boujout, 1986: 99). With its relatively new, 1960s modernist architecture, the Hotel Arribas introduces a theme that pervades

the entire film: the oxymoronic nature of capitalist progress, including its entertainment and tourist industry, whose staleness is constitutive of the novelty it advertises – a fact alarmingly confirmed by the now archaic electronic gadgets, including a pioneering Apple computer, displayed throughout the film as next-generation technology. Combined with other solitary entertainments, they are all signifiers of historical stasis, as they congeal time into static photographs, paintings, drawings, writings and sound recordings, including an automated sound clock whose artificial voice announcing the hours reiterates the false movement at the core of the Wendersian style.

More significantly, reproduction of the real through gadgets and different artistic media is a means for the characters to come to terms with an overwhelming, crushing reality, which they fail to comprehend and to subject to their own ends. In a scene that is almost literally reproduced in *Foreign Land*, Fritz's partner Kate weeps as she looks at the monumental seascape and feels unable to reproduce its contours on paper. Meanwhile another newly-formed couple among the idle film cast frame the same view with their camera, which is then immediately reduced to a miniature and disappointing simulacrum.

Manipulation of scale and proportion is a fundamental property of photography and cinema, with the close-up being the most radical distortion of the real enabled by these media. The effect of such distortions on the spectator is one that Mary Ann Doane directly connects with the growth of capitalism, as the subject is situated as 'epistemologically inadequate' and 'incapable of ever actually mapping or understanding the totality of social forces that determine his or her position' (2009: 63). She says: '[a]lthough the miniature appears completely intelligible and knowable, the gigantic...exceeds the viewer's grasp and incarnates the limited possibility of partial knowledge' (2009: 63). In *The State of Things*, the struggle of self-reflexive characters faced with the impossibility of reproducing the real in its overwhelming totality is directly connected with the disposable nature of photography as an industrial product. The impossible scale of the real thus brings home to the characters (who are the cast and crew of a film within a film) their minute importance within a gigantic setting, wonderfully represented by the tiny bubble car parked by the portentous ruins of the hotel courtyard. The static and descriptive framings used to produce such an effect constantly bring to the fore cinema's photographic stillness and reinforce the general anxiety of cinema's death through stasis on the thematic level, which is corroborated by numerous shots of cinemas in ruins on the streets of Sintra, Lisbon and, towards the end, Los Angeles.

On a similarly metaphorical level, the city is recurrently likened to a sinking ship, as the waves engulf more and more of the hotel. One of the characters points at a plastic globe and comments: 'Lisbon is really right at the edge, the far-western corner of Europe, indeed there's water right in front of my window.' The metaphor of a sinking ship is recurrently replayed in the characters' lines, for example when Fritz reads aloud to himself from the book *The Searchers*, about 'the terrible sense of inevitable doom that overpowered him every time he encountered this ship'.

The idea of ruin and failure that brings historical progression to a standstill is also at the core of *Foreign Land*, a film even more strongly dominated by the motif of a shipwreck, replayed both visually and in the intradiegetic lyrics sung by the female protagonist. According to Salles, the origins of the film are in the photographs of a shipwreck on the Cape Verde coast, taken by the French photographer Jean-Pierre Favreau (Thomas, Bernstein and Salles, 1996: 5). Salles took his crew and cast to Cape Verde to shoot the protagonist couple against the backdrop of this shipwreck, which was then edited as located in Portugal, in combination with majestic imagery of the sea in the surroundings of Sintra and the Tagus River in Lisbon. Here, rather than architectural and technological capitalism, it is the colonial project which is fated to fail, within a disastrous tale of migration and diaspora whose causes hark back to the era of the great discoveries. This idea is again corroborated in the dialogue, through which the shipwreck motif is connected to the end of the urban project, for example, in this line uttered by the shopkeeper Pedro about Lisbon: 'This is not a place to find anybody. This is the land of a people who left for the sea. It's the ideal place to lose somebody or to get lost from oneself.'

If in this film the whole idea of monumental doom is indebted to Wenders, the other important cinephiliac reference is Cinema Novo leader Glauber Rocha and the sea imagery in his films *Black God*, *White Devil* (*Deus e o diabo na terra do sol*, 1964) and, more importantly, *Entranced Earth* (*Terra em transe*, 1967), the latter a sweeping account of Brazilian historical failures against the backdrop of the discovery mythology. Ungraspable monumentality and scale reversal play a key role in the confrontation between colonizer and colonized, as in the famous scene in which the characters become aware of the minute dimensions of their gigantic territory of origin, Brazil, when seen from the colonizer's perspective. Paco and Alex, the lead couple, find themselves in Cape Espichel (the same location as in *The State of Things*), defined in the film as Europe's farthest westerly point,<sup>1</sup> seated at the edge of a precipice beyond which lies the vast open sea. For a moment the sea fills the frame and



then the camera drifts back to capture Alex and Paco from behind, looking out to the sea before them. Alex then says:

You have no idea of where you are, do you? This is the tip of Europe. (*Flinging her arms open*) This is the end! What courage, don't you think? To cross this sea 500 years ago. . . . Just because they thought paradise was there. (*She points left towards the horizon.*) Poor Portuguese . . . they ended up discovering Brazil!

Reinforcing the cinematic power of scale reversal leading to self-reflexive stasis, this scene, moreover, makes explicit a theme that is only latent in Wenders's film, which is sea utopianism. Indeed, *The Survivors*, the film within the film in *The State of Things*, shows the last survivors of an atomic catastrophe marching towards the sea where they hope to find redemption. But the shoot of *The Survivors* stops just as the characters are about to reach the beach, disrupting the fable's utopia and abruptly unveiling the impossibility of the film itself.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, in *Mysteries of Lisbon*, the city in the title seems already to have been swallowed up and thrown into oblivion, as it remains absent from the restricted visual field of its provincial nineteenth-century characters, who cannot perceive beyond the narrow frame of windows and mirrors in their convents, houses and carriages. This could obviously be read as the usual device employed both in studio films and TV serials, which this film began as, in which the recurrent use of tight close-ups betrays the desire to avoid the construction of costly settings. As an adept of such a trick, *Mysteries of Lisbon* could be read as akin to the classical or commercial narrative style. However, the explicit way this is employed so as to elicit the viewer's awareness of the artifice, thus making the city conspicuous for its absence, would rather suit the self-reflexivity normally attributed to modern films.

On the other hand, the superposition of similar stories across generations, suggesting simultaneity rather than historical progression, casts doubt upon the modern teleology. Emphasizing the idea of stasis are the constant inter-medial interferences that freeze historical episodes into paintings, Portuguese tile motifs and in particular recurrent scenes played out in a cardboard cut-out theatre given to the protagonist Pedro by his mother, whom he first meets when he is 14 years old. The reason why he was raised in a convent and kept away from his mother for so long is just one of the many mysteries Pedro is confronted with, in a complicated plot that successively unfolds the various past identities of Father Diniz, the priest who took care of his

education. In a scene that summarizes the film's conception as a whole, Father Diniz, accompanied by his helper Dona Antónia, talks with Pedro's mother, unaware that the conversation is being seen and heard by Pedro himself through the window. Diniz urges Pedro's mother to travel to Santarém, where her tyrannical husband is currently lying on his deathbed, in order to grant him forgiveness. Placed in the position of a film spectator and unable to interfere, Pedro is radically opposed to this plan that, he rightly fears, will tear him apart from his mother once again. The characters outside his window are then replaced by the miniatures in the cardboard cut-out theatre representing his mother, Father Diniz and Dona Antónia, whom Pedro flips down with mere flicks of his finger. As well as reducing cinema to its reality of fiction and mechanical reproduction, this self-reflexive scene also highlights the function of scale reversal as enabler of spectatorial participation.

Scale dialectics in the cinema have been addressed, among others, by Gilles Deleuze, who focused on the emphasis on large or small forms as typical of action montage cinema, examples ranging from Sergei Eisenstein for the large form to Charlie Chaplin for the small form (Deleuze, 2005a: 145). In the three exemplary scenes described above, however, rather than action, scale reversal invariably elicits reflexive stasis, as a perplexed spectator within the diegesis brings the action to a halt. As such, scale reversal resonates rather with Deleuze's idea of the time-image and the 'cinema of the seer', whilst concomitantly bringing into question his classification of these devices as classical or modern.

### Modern-~~Postmodern~~ Ruins

The representation of the city through ruins, desertification and stagnation, which eschews the buzz and perpetual movement inherent in the modernist urban experience, as seen in *The State of Things* and *Foreign Land*, as much as the lack of visual motifs for it, as in the case of *Mysteries of Lisbon*, have been seen as characteristic of ~~postmodern~~ cinematic cities. Indeed, the films in focus here seem to follow to the letter the mix of nostalgia, citation and self-defeating narrative structure that constitutes the standard ~~postmodern~~ recipe. As Dudley Andrew puts it:

Whereas before World War II cinematic modernism was in league with Joyce, Döblin, and Dos Passos in rendering cities visible through 'symphonic form', postmodern writers and filmmakers find the city invisible, discordant, and in a

fundamental way unrepresentable. Temporal simultaneity and spatial randomness work against this medium of time and space, for in cities today simultaneity could mean being nowhere as well as everywhere at once. (2010: 37)

When it comes to the association of the urban experience with doom, however, ~~postmodern~~ cities differ little from what is often described as the ‘modern’ city, starting with the centrality of war, catastrophe and ruins in the conceptualization of modernity itself. It is sufficient to quote Walter Benjamin’s memorable definition of modernity in his aphorism on Paul Klee’s *Angelus Novus*, an angel who looks in terror at the debris of the past, whilst irresistibly compelled into the future by the storm of progress (Benjamin, 1999: 249). This angel of history, it is worth recalling, makes a double-bill appearance in a later Wenders film, *The Wings of Desire* (*Der Himmel über Berlin*, 1987), set in a fractured and war-scarred Berlin.

The political importance of ruins within the modern cinematic project resides in the fact that, by raising awareness of past catastrophes, they introduce self-reflexive stasis, which in turn makes room for participative spectatorship. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle aptly summarize this phenomenon in the following terms:

In its ambivalence and amorphousness, the ruin functions as a uniquely flexible and productive trope for modernity’s self-awareness. Indeed, it is one of the master tropes of modern reflexivity, precisely because it encapsulates vacuity and loss as underlying constituents of the modern identity. It is the reflexivity of a culture that interrogates its own becoming. (2010: 6–7)

As a foundational piece within the cinephiliac chain described above, *Mysteries of Lisbon* is a panegyric to the imagined ruins of Portugal, as literally expressed in the novel on which it is based by the protagonist, Father Diniz, in apocalyptic terms:

Everything will fall apart in Portugal. The day is not far off when life here will become, for many, boring and disgusting. Principles will be overturned, civil war will not content itself with a small tribute of blood, there will be no losers or winners; anarchy, after the war, will penetrate the government, whichever it is, and the foundations of a new edifice will be the corpses and ruins of many fortunes. Lucky those who will be able to watch from afar as the motherland falls into the vulture’s claws. (Castelo Branco, 2010: 160)

As is well known, urban settings in ruins, as epitomized by neorealist films such as *Germany Year Zero* (*Germania anno zero*, Roberto Rossellini, 1947), were hailed by André Bazin as the realist kernel of cinematic modernity. Deleuze himself dates modern cinema from the end of ~~the Second~~ World War, in passages that seem to apply directly to the films in focus here, as they describe ~~post-war~~ urban spaces as ‘any-space-whatevers’, made of ‘demolished towns . . . shanty towns . . . vast unused places, docks, warehouses, heaps of girders and scrap iron’ (Deleuze, 2005a: 124), most of which can be found in the catastrophe sci-fi *The Survivors*, the film within the film in *The State of Things*. The magnitude of the war, for Deleuze, caused the time-image, typical of modernity, to interfere with and disrupt the action-image he attributes to classical Hollywood and montage cinema in general, creating characters who are observers or ‘seers’ rather than agents, in a world that overwhelms their comprehension.

Given the recurrence of war in human history, however, there is scope to investigate the combination of ruins and modernity before ~~the Second~~ World War. Indeed, Johannes von Moltke identifies ruins right at the birth of cinema, for example in the Lumière brothers’ film *The Demolition of a Wall* (*Démolition d’un mur*, 1895), which shows the destruction of a wall and its immediate reconstruction, achieved with the simple trick of running the film backwards. For von Moltke, ‘this little episode from 1895 might serve as a cinematic epigraph for the broader aesthetic, ontological, and epistemological imbrications of cinema and ruin in modernity’ (2010: 396). This understanding coheres with the fact that cinema is not only related to, but a result of modernity. As Ben Singer puts it, cinema emerged ‘within the sensory environment of urban modernity’ related to ‘late nineteenth-century technologies of space and time, and its interactions with adjacent elements in the new visual culture of advanced capitalism’ (2001: 102). This undeniable fact, however, did not prevent Bazin from developing a concept of ~~post-war~~ modern cinema, based on phenomenological realism, that not only disregards cinema’s modern nature, but disqualifies the modernist avant-gardes of the 1920s themselves, including Eisenstein, from being modern because of their reliance on montage. Deleuze then reinforced this model by rebranding it as time-image as opposed to movement-image. In the wake of these ~~ground-breaking~~ approaches came many other appropriations of the modern project as a means to defend certain cinemas against others, the usual foe being Hollywood. Beneficiaries have traditionally been the new waves of the 1960s and 70s, as well as new cinemas of all times, defined as modern or

‘neo-modern’ (Orr and Taxidou, 2000: 7), as opposed to a classical, conservative norm.

On the other hand, the pioneering theorist of the ~~postmodern~~ condition, Jean-François Lyotard, dates ~~postmodernity~~ back to the birth of a reconstructed Europe, that is, ‘at least to the end of the 1950s, which for Europe marks the completion of reconstruction’ (1984: 3). Such an understanding would certainly clash with most approaches to the modern project described above, not least the Bazin-Deleuze periodization, which classifies under the modern banner a variety of productions stretching up to their own day. Both Bazin and Deleuze defended modernity on the basis of the novelty – hence progressive impetus – inherent in the original sense of the word ‘modern’, an idea that resonates with Jürgen Habermas’s more recent defence of the modern in terms of a revolt ‘against the normalizing functions of tradition’ and a rebellion ‘against all that is normative’ (Habermas and Ben-Habib, 1981: 5). In his public debate with Lyotard, Habermas famously refused to accept the end of the modern project and its claim to progressive politics, dismissing Lyotard’s description of the fall from grace, in the ~~postmodern~~ era, of scientific and rational knowledge (Lyotard, 1986: xxiv).

As far as cinema is concerned, however, Deleuze complicates the debate further by attributing progression to the movement-image, that is, to classical rather than modern cinema, in the following terms:

Time as progression derives from the movement-image or from successive shots... But in modern cinema, in contrast, the time-image is no longer empirical, nor metaphysical; it is transcendental in the sense that Kant gives this word: time is out of joint and presents itself in the pure state. (2005b: 260)

This understanding bears a striking resonance with the phenomena of temporal stasis and urban stagnation pointed out in the three films in question here, making them equally prone to characterizations as modern and ~~postmodern~~, and bringing into question the usefulness of such a criterion. As Rancière rightly points out:

If there is a political question in contemporary art, it will not be grasped in terms of a modern/postmodern opposition. It will be grasped through an analysis of the metamorphoses of the political ‘third’, the politics founded on the play of exchanges and displacements between the art world and that of non-art. (2009: 51)

This notwithstanding, Deleuze's definition of a 'time out of joint' and 'in pure state' is entirely applicable to the representation of urban Portugal in the films in focus here. Indeed, these films make use precisely of the country's location at the westernmost end of Europe, that is, at the periphery of Europe's self-attributed modernity, so as to configure it as a kind of space-time hiatus, or a 'time in pure state', that offers a distanced viewpoint on worldly phenomena. Seen in this light, the categories of modern or ~~postmodern~~ become irrelevant, as they fail to provide reliable indicators of progressive politics. My view is that, if such indicators exist, they are more likely to be found in the films' aesthetic features rather than in the historical moment of their production. Two such possible indicators, I propose, are reflexive stasis and scale reversal.

Needless to say, if we are to discard the modern and ~~postmodern~~ categories as political and/or artistic pointers, then the 'classical' as applied to cinema must also be brought under suspicion. Indeed, the confusion around this label is no less than with its counterparts. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson famously defined a 'classical' style with regard to Hollywood films produced from its inception up to the 1960s (2002). However, the Bazin-Deleuze identification of the classical with montage and action cinemas meant that virtually any films not in line with phenomenological realism, for the former, and the time-image for the latter, could, in principle, be considered 'classical' in style. However, since Miriam Hansen's groundbreaking article, 'The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism' (2000), more convincing organizations of film history have started to emerge. Among other compelling arguments, Hansen highlights the self-reflexive potential of old Hollywood classics – for example, the excessive physicality of slapstick comedy (2000: 342–43) – to explain how such films could have sparked vernacular modernisms elsewhere in the world. More recently, Laura Mulvey has formulated a similar argument, drawing on the self-reflexive potential of the rear-projection device, which 'smuggles something of modernism' into the 'classical' narrative (2011: 208).

My own position is that the classical-modern-~~postmodern~~ triptych obscures what is actually at stake in this debate, namely the latent expectation that an evolutionary line will confirm the teleology of history that privileges the new over the old. However, what all those sophisticated approaches – including Bazin's realism, Deleuze's time-image, Hansen's vernacular modernism and 'neo-modern' views of new waves and new cinemas – revolve around are moments or elements that represent or elicit a self-reflexive

stoppage in time, allowing for spectatorial participation as evidence of a film's artistic and political credentials. My intended contribution to this debate is the idea of scale reversal as a natural complement to reflexive stasis, and both as more reliable indicators of a film's value than historical teleology. As I hope to have demonstrated, urban Portugal, in its cinematic portrayal as a time=space hiatus favouring distanced observation and reflexivity, effectively dispenses with categories hinging on chronological markers and evolutionist periodizations. Rather than historical and geographical evolution, it is the workings of time and space in the films themselves, expressed in terms of urban stasis on a global scale, that help us to define their place in history.

## Notes

- 1 The actual westernmost point in Portugal (and therefore in Europe) is Cape Roca, not far from Espichel.
- 2 An interesting cinephiliac note in this respect is that Glauber Rocha, the major figure looming behind *Foreign Land*, was in Sintra when Wenders was stationed there to shoot *The State of Things*, and the film's lead actor, Patrick Bauchau, conducted a video interview with him, in which Rocha solemnly declares that 'Sintra is a wonderful place to die'. Rocha's untimely death would come just a few months thereafter. The casting of Patrick Bauchau to play the protagonist filmmaker in *The State of Things* is itself a cinephile choice, due to the fact that Wenders 'thought he was wonderful in Eric Rohmer's *La Collectionneuse*' (Wenders, 2001: 199).





# 11

## Slow Motion Pictures: Casting Inertia in Contemporary Berlin Film

Andrew J. Webber

This essay builds upon recent work I have done on contemporary films set in Berlin, under the broad perspective of urban performance. This emerged out of my study of Berlin's cultural topography over the (long) twentieth century and the dialectic between performative energy and a more melancholic tendency that I traced there, following the method of Walter Benjamin (Webber, 2008). This dialectical disposition could be visualized in the allegorical condition of the angel of history, in Benjamin's figuration: caught in a kind of suspended animation, even as it is driven back at high speed into the future, and seeing history in its melancholic stare as an inert pile of material residue (Benjamin, 1969: 257–58). As an exemplary form of such historical detritus we could think of the Berlin of the early ~~post-war~~ years, and its *Trümmerfilme* or 'rubble films', rendering the city in a scenography of reduction to inert matter, with life struggling to find energy in it. And the iconic angels of Wim Wenders's *Wings of Desire* (*Der Himmel über Berlin*, 1987) are avatars of the Berlin *angelus novus*, beholding that destruction from the future in their peculiar condition between acceleration and inertia. The Berlin study also looked at the tendency towards suspended animation in other – less likely – chapters of the city's cultural history. Thus, I read Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of the City* (*Berlin: Sinfonie einer Großstadt*, 1927) against the grain of its technologically driven momentum, for the imprint of still images and traumatic arrest. As such, Ruttmann's city symphony was aligned with the 2001 remake by Thomas Schadt, which could be seen as

a study in contemporary urban inertia, capitalizing on the cult of Berlin after 1945 as the allegorical city of melancholia. It appears as a metropolis that remains possessed by the ghosts of its burdened history and is impeded in its movement towards the future. Berlin is a city driven by accelerated development in the years following unification in 1989, but it nonetheless remains in many respects curiously slow-paced for a major capital, not fully up to the fast-forward performance for which it has been cast.

Other recent films have focused upon the contradictory gearing of Berlin, exploring the experience of those whose lives tend towards inertia while things rush around them. This virtual inertia is typically represented in ambiguous fashion, as the figures in question are seen caught between exclusion from and resistance to the fantasy of the dynamic twenty-first century capital. In a recently published essay entitled 'Topographical Turns' (Webber, 2012), centring on Christian Petzold's 2005 film, *Gespenster* or *Ghosts*, I considered a particular version of this tendency through the scenario of casting (for film or television work). *Ghosts* relates the narrative of a solitary young girl, Nina, who meets and falls in love with another girl – the more streetwise Toni – and is then apparently recognized by a French woman (Françoise) as the daughter she had lost as an infant in Berlin. Both Toni, who takes Nina to a casting session, and Françoise seem to offer Nina a potential for connection and mobility; but by the end of the film both have abandoned her, and she can only slowly walk off alone. The ghosts of the title are perhaps to be understood as referencing all of the characters in the narrative, but especially Nina in her bare and disconnected urban existence.

The 'Topographical Turns' essay was concerned with the role of casting as an urban fantasy of mobility, a removal from the phantom condition of nonentity in the city, but also in the strictures or arrest to which that fantasy is subject. The present essay returns to this film, developing a discussion of spectrality as a condition cast in a form of inert mobility. Spectres, we might say, 'in-animate' scenes; that is, they put spirit into matter, but spirit of an undead kind, devoid of live motion. In this sense, Petzold's Nina, as a figure lost and then found and then lost again in the city, is affiliated to the archetypal foundling of the German cultural tradition, Caspar Hauser. Jakob Wassermann's eponymous novel of 1908, which established Caspar Hauser's emblematic status, is subtitled 'or the Inertia of the Heart' ('oder die Trägheit des Herzens'). And like that figure of enigmatic provenance, as an object of adoption, abduction and abuse (as well as for the fantasies of others), the inertia that Nina embodies or exposes in the world she inhabits seems to be

one of the heart, where emotional investment is reduced to impassivity, as much as anything else.

In this sense, Petzold's *Ghosts* should be considered in the context of other works by the director, especially the other films of his so-called 'Ghosts Trilogy', with their signature effects of suspension and retardation. At the same time, the film can be read in conjunction with other recent Berlin films concerned with such performance scenarios as casting and the vicissitudes of mobility and vitality associated with them. Two examples, which were considered briefly in the 'Topographical Turns' essay, are *Ein schöner Tag* (*One Fine Day*, 2001) by Thomas Arslan and *Stadt als Beute* (*City as Prey*, 2005), co-directed by Irene von Alberti, Miriam Dehne and Esther Gronenborn. In films such as these, the existential spectacle of inertia is seen as a by-product of an urban population that is not fully up to speed with capitalism in its contemporary, 'late' form, characterized by human performances that are out of joint in spatio-temporal terms. Or perhaps it could rather be said that late capitalism has such elements of 'uneconomic' retardation built into its economic logic, so that its apparent hyper-acceleration is also, at least locally and sporadically, slowed right down.

Berlin seems to provide a paradigmatic case of this running and stopping logic of late capitalism. It is a city that we might see as allegorized in perhaps the most internationally visible Berlin figure of the last 15 years, the title figure of Tom Tykwer's *Run Lola Run* (*Lola rennt*, 1998), performing hard and fast to get the money but also caught in a kind of suspended animation, recursive in her performances, running as it were on the spot (Webber 2008: 284–96). Lola could be said to be the vehicle for the casting of a new Berlin image, and was indeed seized upon by the then Governing Mayor, Eberhard Diepgen, as a marketable image for his 'running' of the city. But this is a film vehicle that is not as straightforwardly dynamic as it may appear to be. Lola's hyper-mediated form could in fact be understood as embodying a particular version of the inertia that Paul Virilio (1999) sees as fundamental to the ultra-high-speed gearing of a contemporary world that is brought to us by the virtual immediacy of new media. In my reading, *Run Lola Run* is a film that is only at first sight dynamically free of what Brian Ladd (1997) has called the ghosts of Berlin, this pre-eminently haunted late modern city. In its desperately fast-run search for capital in a city which is under accelerated, capital-driven reconstruction, the film remains in a certain state of hauntedness, of traumatic return to the spot. As such, it shares the structural logic of Petzold's *Ghosts*, which is also a film in which the state of being haunted is bound up with

issues of capital, and its lack. While *Ghosts* generally runs much more slowly than *Run Lola Run*, the two films can be understood as companion pieces, partaking in the same fundamental condition, with the vagabond Nina – who breaks into a run only once – as a kind of afterlife figure, a slow-motion, spectral counterpart for the Lola who ran through Berlin seven years earlier. In either case, with their shared scenarios of theft from shops or a bank, we see capitalism from the side of those whose relationship to it is disordered and participation illicit.

The frame of reference for the ‘Topographical Turns’ essay was Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*, as applied to the phantom or melancholic condition of late capitalism in its contemporary Berlin form. The present essay follows upon this by engaging in questions about exchange and growth as urban economic principles and their problematic transfer to identity processes – the domain of what could be called ontological capital, by analogy with the categories of ‘cultural’ or ‘social capital’ developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1986: 241–58). As we shall see, in *Ghosts* this ontological capital is subject to an uncanny sense of lack; it has a phantom character. Following Derrida’s focal pun in *Specters of Marx*, the ontological is transferred here into the ‘hauntological’, a kind of living in the city that is cast as an impeded or slow-motion afterlife. Here, I would like to take up some of the motifs that interested me in my argument about the hauntological condition of *Ghosts* and to consider their potential for the theme of urban inertia. This leads, in turn, to broader questions about the dynamics and statics of being in the city, and the ways in which investment, occupation and possession are played out in the shadowy underside of capital and of this particular capital city. And those terms – investment, occupation and possession – should be understood here at once in the framework of material realities and of psychical ones, with ontological capital derived as a function of the two.

An appropriate place to start in the rereading of *Ghosts* proposed here is with the work of Fredric Jameson, which is so committed to exploring the psychical constitution of the cultural and political economy of capitalism. Jameson’s *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) opens with a discussion, following Martin Heidegger, of Vincent van Gogh’s classic early modernist painting, *A Pair of Boots* (1887). The boots are read as those of a peasant and hence with an attachment to the land, or to what Heidegger calls the Earth – broadly, material reality before symbolic organization. I would like to consider what it might mean to read the boots instead as those of a city dweller, a member of the urban *Lumpenproletariat*, and so more evidently

sited in the symbolic space of society, or – again, broadly – what Heidegger calls World. What this would reveal is that the modern city, as the ultimate construction of World, is built upon degrees of exclusion for certain classes of resident: that different subjects walk the city and partake in the World in very different ways. Jameson follows Heidegger in seeing the boots as the icons of rural life that they evidently are, locating them where they indicatively belong, in the domain of the Earth. And he concurs with Heidegger that in this artwork, which he identifies as having an earthbound tendency towards the ‘inert’ (Jameson, 1991: 7), the element of Earth is in fact worked into something that is alive with the meaning of its production. That is, Earth becomes attached to World through the artwork, which mediates dialectically between them. Heidegger claims that the apparently inert shoes in fact vibrate with the ‘silent call of the earth’ as well as embodying its fallow desolation (Jameson 1991: 8). The inert is modulated into an energetic state by the transformation of one form of materiality, ‘the earth itself and its paths and physical objects’ (Jameson, 1991: 8), into another: that of the oil painting. The painting, figured by Jameson as occupied by the passivity of the matter from which it is drawn, is in fact animated by its symptomatic meaning, as the boots at rest stand in for the dynamics of production – in the field and on the canvas, in earth and paint.

Van Gogh’s iconic boots are seen, then, as objects of inertia – appropriately enough, we might think, for the abandoned equipment of human movement in and across the land – but also invested with active and transformative meaning, ready for renewed propulsion. It is this utopian energy in inertia that allows Jameson to follow Heidegger’s lead and adopt them as exemplars of the modernist project – and hence, we might add, as fit to hang in the galleries of the World and be traded in its auction rooms. As such, he sets them against another image, Andy Warhol’s *Diamond Dust Shoes* (1980), which reproduce shoes as urban commodity, in the style of a shop window or fashion photograph, but render them in the style of a photographic negative. They are cast as ‘deathly’, as Jameson (1991: 9) writes, or – we might say – as spectral. The earth of van Gogh’s boots is replaced here by diamond dust, by the dispersed symbolic material of commodity value, sprinkled over the footwear. Shoes made for urban walking rather than rural working, for the pleasure of the leisured classes, are suspended here as surface objects, as simulacra in the classic ~~postmodern~~ style – and hence as commodity for the pleasure of gallery-going classes and private owners. But it is a pleasure that is also a kind of threat. Their spectrality has a vampiric character, transmitted in the

act of viewing. The commodity image, Jameson writes, ‘mortifies the reified eye of the viewer’ (1991: 9). That is, the pictorial rack of ghost shoes acts as a memento mori of aesthetic consumerism, displaying the hauntological condition of the transaction between postmodern culture and the economic logic of late capitalism.

In returning here to Petzold’s film, I will follow the model of these two sets of shoes, both caught in suspended animation, to enter into a consideration of the role of footwear and other items of clothing in the representation of the postmodernity of late capitalism as haunted by a condition of inertia. And, as in the paintings of the shoes, as analysed by Jameson, the representation of shoes and other clothing in *Ghosts* will be seen to be intimately bound up with the workings of the medium in which they appear. If the Earthbound aesthetic of van Gogh appears to have been superseded by a World-bound one in Warhol’s image, a surface effect of pure product or symbol, this is caught in a spectral condition of dust, a luminous form of dead matter. In the high-speed World of postmodern urban life, there is in other words a return to inertia of a more radical kind, to a material state that resists the transformative dynamics of modernist representation and merely becomes disposed for viewing as the ghost of its own matter. It is this form of spectrality of representation in the era of (very) late capitalism that I considered in my earlier reading of *Ghosts*, and which could be said to be particularly characteristic of film as the heroic new medium of mobilization in the age of modernity now made to lead an adaptive existence under the hypermedial regime of postmodernity.

In the moving images of the film medium, the pictorial logic of inertia in the still image is animated. However, as Laura Mulvey has shown in her *Death 24× a Second*, it is an animation whose conditions of possibility are marked from the start by a mortifying stillness. In the advanced manipulation of moving images in postmodernity, that rigor mortis is exposed in a new set of forms. In *Ghosts*, its presence is largely of a virtual kind: it is there in forms of slow motion (the generalized slow movement of figures as well as the retarding effects of the film’s camerawork and editing and the actual slow motion of one of the film’s sequences). And it is also iconographically present in a set of still images, emblems of an inert state behind the dynamics of the film medium. The photograph of the child that Françoise has lost in that sense stands for the traumatic interruption of the film of a life, and the computer-generated images of how that child might have looked as it grew up for an abstract rendition of the ghost of that life. Those images are versions of what German calls *Phantombilder* – identikit images, used in particular in searches



for the disappeared, for criminals or victims of crime. And in Petzold's film, the phantom image represents the more general condition of identity cast into a shadow or phantom form: ontology as hauntology. Ontological capital – the means to assert and maintain an identity – is set under the sign of the lost, the missing or the stolen and hence takes on a phantom character. There is an intimate, metonymic logic to the fact that the phantom images of a projected identity as Françoise's daughter are kept – along with her cash – in the wallet that Toni snatches from her. When Nina retrieves the discarded wallet, emptied of money, and finds them as ghostly vestiges of an identity which might be hers, she has also already been discarded herself. The phantom images – which she throws away once more in the park bin where she found them – figure her return to a phantom existence; it is as if she has found a rudimentary storyboard for the latter-day ghost film in which she has been cast.

Petzold's film thus plays out a version of a fundamental disposition of cinema as a *medium* also in the spiritist sense of the word, an apparatus that may mediate phantom images. This is the representational mode of Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), which is the origin of the title of *Ghosts* and one of the sources of its haunted disposition. The title is an echo of the intertitle that marks the arrival of Murnau's protagonist Harker (or Hutter) in the land of phantoms: 'And when he crossed the bridge, the ghosts came to meet him.' In *Nosferatu*, the line heralds the arrival of the coach of the vampire and the famous sequence where the coach is propelled forward to the castle of *Nosferatu* in uncannily accelerated motion, and transformed into a phantom form by the use of negative stock. The sequence has its equivalent in more subtle effects of mediation and transportation in *Ghosts*. In Petzold's film world, the car takes on the uncanny potency of Murnau's Gothic automotive coach, with the high speed of the coach converted into the sense of automotive inertia produced by shooting the driving scenes entirely from the virtually immobile space within. It thus produces a form of what early filmic discourse called the phantom ride. In other Petzold films, this gliding leads to catastrophic accidents which then haunt its mobility; here, it becomes a vehicle for the traumatic return of ghosts from the past.

Françoise drives the car to the scene of the abduction in the sort of somnambulant state that is characteristic of her and appears to experience the scene in CCTV on her mind-screen as she does so. Here, Françoise, with her frozen attachment to loss, embodies a particular form of the condition of new bourgeois melancholia that Petzold sees as the distinguishing feature of

Berlin School films (Graf, Hochhäusler and Petzold, 2006: 4). The ghostly, nocturnal drive through Berlin to the apparent scene of the abduction is continued in another form here. The uncanny motion of Murnau's coach is passed from the gliding, undead car onto another vehicle (the shopping trolley), shot in another medium. The negative stock of Murnau's coach-ride is now remediated in the phantom effect of the CCTV footage, which 'haunts' Françoise as a kind of screen-memory, uncertain in its authenticity (notwithstanding the use of surveillance technology designed to produce reliable evidence of theft and other crimes). The uncanny animation of the abduction of Harker in the vampire's coach (as a vehicle of the potentiating apparatus of film as *medium*) is transmuted in the scene of abduction in a shopping trolley, slowed down and in fixed-frame in the indistinct monochrome of CCTV. It is a kind of ghostly footage that indicates less a hyper-activation of the medium of film than its winding back into a state close to inertia. When, later in the film, Françoise appears to have found her lost daughter in Nina, she takes her for a drive in the car, as if enacting a recuperative capture of what she has lost, and claiming to have awakened from her somnambulant state, the sort of sleeping sickness that afflicts her. But – in the light of the film's denouement – the car rather becomes a vehicle for Françoise to act out the ghostly logic of the abduction scene, taking possession of the 'daughter' whose memory possesses her, before sinking back into melancholic inertia and letting her be taken away once more.

Above all, what the CCTV sequence shows, in its uncannily dreamlike character, is the inability of the beholding subject to intervene after the fact: the mother who loses the child is cast in a kind of uncannily inert condition, again and again, by footage set for compulsively replay. The negative footage of the coach in *Nosferatu* could still be understood as exhibiting the thrilling new possibilities of film technology and technique, imbued – even in its phantom character – with the utopian spirit of modernism. *Nosferatu* is a spirit figure attached to dead earth from which he will reawaken (hence the coffin of earth in which he has to be transported); and he embodies the fantasy of projecting the dead matter of film stock into a form of supernatural life. The CCTV of *Ghosts*, on the other hand, is on the side of World, in Heidegger's terms; but the surveillance apparatus of social order merely produces footage of a negative state of loss. It subjects the advanced digital mimesis of contemporary film to possession by a zombie-like sub-technology, rendering its life as a decelerated, monochromatic flow of practically inert cinematographic matter. We should recall that *Nosferatu* represents vampirism

as a Gothic, parasitic extension of capitalist economy, of marine trading and the speculative purchase of real estate; and the CCTV function in Petzold's film is also attached to commerce – used in or outside shops and intended to capture acts of theft, of the transgression of the capitalist system of trading and ownership. Both films are about possession and taking possession, in both material and psychical senses.

This phantom imagery is a particular derivation of the sort of ~~postmodern~~ condition of representation that Jameson describes. The medium of film is cast between the conditions that he sees exhibited in the images of van Gogh and Warhol: the animation of dead matter and its representation under the ghostly sign of the negative. On the face of it, *Ghosts* and the other recent Berlin films that have been mentioned here might appear to be placed on the side of transformative potential, bringing 'dead' or inert existence to new life. This is the logic of the particular urban fantasy of casting that we see operating in *Ghosts* and other films, as more widely in the contemporary social order. The currency of this fantasy is such that it has been imported into the German language, in particular through the profusion of casting shows on television. Casting represents the media-borne possibility of transforming your lot by performing as another, and so finding a new identity in life. To be nobody and then become somebody through a casting scenario is to achieve ontological capital, or to have it invested in you. And the films in question are intently concerned with both the identity of Berlin as a city in search of such an investment of capital on a large scale, and of its inhabitants doing the same on a scaled-down level. Walter Benjamin trades on the pun of Capital and the capital (Webber, 2008: 13), and it is of course the case that capital cities are always driven to look for self-realization through capital, in both economic and cultural terms. They are at once privileged sites of its accumulation and dynamic exchange and particularly given to its negative effects in extremes of want or destitution, and thus host to the spectres produced in its system. What the casting scenario of *Ghosts* accordingly produces is not a transformation of ontological capital, but a return to the spectral condition of not-having and not-being in the city.

Like the other parts of Petzold's 'Ghosts Trilogy', the middle work, *Ghosts*, is thus preoccupied with, indeed possessed by, the ghosts of the contemporary socioeconomic order. It is a key example of what has come to be known as the contemporary Berlin School (*Berliner Schule*) of neorealist filmmaking, but Petzold's realism is one that questions the materiality of the everyday world it inhabits, registering effects of hauntedness. One of the distinctive

characteristics of the Berlin School, and not least of Petzold's version of it, is a calculated slowness and hence a tendency towards inertia: imaging modernity as suspended in its animation. This sometimes takes his films out of the city and into more decelerated or retarded modes of life on the land; but in *Ghosts*, it is projected into and takes possession of the heart of the revitalized metropolis of Berlin, moving between the high-end, globalized architecture of the Potsdamer Platz and a kind of urban pastoral – city turned towards land, World towards Earth – of the Tiergarten Park. A constant theme in Petzold's filmmaking is the dysfunctional apparatus of work and finance in the world of late capitalism, and the casting of *Ghosts* in the intermediate territory between the marketplace of the Potsdamer Platz and the deserted park is designed to expose this crisis in the order of World from the margins at its centre. It is an apparatus that is prone to seizures in its dynamics. There is, in other words, a ghost in the machine of very late capital, and it might well be called inertia. We could think of Benjamin's angel of history as replicated in the ~~postmodern~~ form of a ghost of history. As Petzold himself suggests, the ghostliness of the film can be understood as that of a kind of *posthistoire*: a phantom narrative cast in the suspended aftermath of the dynamics of history (Webber, 2012: 78). If the baby that may or may not be identical with Nina was snatched from in front of a supermarket while Françoise was staying in Berlin in 1989 (the year of unification), then Nina's ghostliness would plausibly be, at least at one level, allegorical in character. Taken from a place of capitalist exchange, while her mother is presumably engaged in shopping, Nina remains dispossessed in the capital-driven order of the unified capital city. And her state of dispossession marks her out as a more or less inert figure in the dynamics of that order.

In order to consider how the structures of personal and historical possession and dispossession are played out, we return now to footwear in artworks, as discussed by Heidegger and Jameson. Pulling back from *Ghosts* for a moment, we could extrapolate from the boots of van Gogh's peasant, cast between inertia and vibrancy, and consider the athletic footwear of Tykwer's Lola, her Doctor Martin boots that do not seem well designed for a city marathon. These working boots refashioned for recreational use and fashion value are set in dynamic motion, along with the rest of Lola's offbeat Berlin clothing, in order for her to run the city and to show the city running. While Marlene Dietrich's Lola-Lola put Weimar Berlin iconically on show as a seductive and semi-clad stage performance, Tykwer's Lola releases the performance dynamically onto the streets as an image for the twenty-first-century city.

However, that athletic animation is haunted by other less positively directed forms of movement – partly through the citational relationship with Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) – and with the prospect of traumatic arrest, of mortal inertia. Not for nothing does Lola repeatedly encounter an emergency vehicle, a leitmotif of the film standing for the risks it runs of traumatic impact or arrest and the dissipation of its hyper-animated energy.

As noted before, the Nina of *Ghosts* might be seen as a ghostly counterpart to Tykwer's Lola. Indeed the scene, bathed in red light, in which Nina and Toni dance in a party in the house of the casting director would seem explicitly to reference the blood-coloured scenes between Lola and her lover that punctuate and suspend the dynamic drive of *Run Lola Run*. We might also note that one of the identities that Nina is cast into in the casting scene is that of Marlene Dietrich in her cross-dressing performance, a costume-role as model of performative agency that she, however, fails to take up. If Tykwer's film is haunted in its background by the ghost of an inertia effect, then here it takes centre stage. In *Ghosts*, clothes are the medium – and here too that term should be understood in both technical and spiritist senses – of spectrality (we might think of the sheet in which spirits conventionally shroud themselves in order to be seen and not seen). Another of the film's intertexts comes into play here – the fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm, 'The Little Death Shroud', which warns against excessive mourning. Through the tears of the mother who cannot let go of her dead child, the shroud in question is metonymically invested with a suspension of life-force – with recursive attachment to the lost object as a principle of inertia, of not moving on.

In *Ghosts*, clothing is cast in an elaborate system of exchange – lost and found, swapped and stolen, discarded and damaged. It represents a kind of alternative economy: objects of capitalism that are put into another kind of circulation – consumed, recycled and cast away. I have suggested that the film is concerned with a struggle for ontological capital, for the formation or production of an identity position that has value in the late capitalist city; and clothes have a significant part to play here. It might not be too fanciful to think about clothing as a particular medium of the life-and-death struggle between energy or productivity and inertia or incapacity in the contemporary city. Clothes are accoutrements of identity performance – designed to figure a body in its motions. They are on the body but not fully of it – inert as such, but moving with the body and often intended to give it an appearance of vital energy when it is at rest. And they are prime markers of access to capital, as to ontological capital.

Let us consider one of Nina's T-shirts. She peels off the top one to give it to her newfound friend and then girlfriend, Toni, and underneath is another one with a ubiquitously familiar German design – a yacht in sail representing the regatta on Lake Chiemsee in Bavaria as a privileged location of youthful recreation. The dynamic image is out of place in Berlin and on the practically inert and dispossessed figure of Nina, as middle-class leisured movement is displaced by the vagrancy of the urban underclass, the yacht representing a form of ontological currency to which this subaltern figure has no access. Worn by an urban ghost, the yacht, we might say, becomes a ghost ship, one with the spectral movements of *Nosferatu's* ship perhaps, given that Murnau's film is adopted as a vehicle for Petzold's. If the T-shirt references *Nosferatu's* ship, we can see it as associated with the coach that Murnau's protagonist catches, or is captured by, to approach the castle of the vampire, and hence in relay with the other vehicles considered above. Inertia is represented here in a Gothic mode: classically, the condition of being frozen by dread, as if possessed by dead matter – a recurrent feature of *Nosferatu*. While this supernatural extremity of affect is missing from Petzold's ghost-film, both within the diegesis and for the viewer, it nonetheless approximates such freezing effects. Through the shared system of transportation, *Ghosts* vampirically attaches itself to *Nosferatu* or is an object of parasitic attachment for it, a vehicle for its return as an archetypal film fantasy of contagious undeadness.

As Harker seeks a new life in his passage as estate agent into the domain of the vampire, so Petzold's Nina subjects herself to the fantasy of self-transformation in the casting session (the director's house will become the equivalent of the vampire's castle in the film's exploitation narrative). When Nina and Toni attend the session, they are given identical T-shirts to wear, carrying the name of the production for which they might be cast – *Freundinnen*, or *Girlfriends*. It is a performance that ultimately fails both in terms of the casting scene and in the real lives of these two vagrant figures – ghosts abroad in the city. In the casting, in which the two are supposed to be the girlfriends of the title on their T-shirts and to describe what brought them together, Toni puts in a lively performance, while Nina is resolutely inert. Only gradually and after repeated prompting does she come to life, this in order to tell a quiet story of a dream in which she witnessed the rape of her girlfriend – Toni – and was unable to move to intervene. The dream re-enacts the scene that opens the film, when Toni is attacked by two men in the Tiergarten Park and Nina looks on, in a state of inertia. At the same time,

it introduces into the scene of violence an open-top car with music playing from it, as if melding the two narrative strands of the scene in the park and the open-top car driving through Berlin that are cross-cut at the start of the film. It seems that Nina's dream-life (actual or fantasized) is possessed in anticipation by the phantom car in which she will be 'abducted' by the woman claiming to be her mother later. Toni tells the inexperienced Nina that a casting session demands that you are '*unheimlich lebendig*' – literally, 'uncannily lively' (dead lively, we might say). And so Nina is in her casting performance, at once much more compelling than Toni in her 'lively' performance but also cast in a state of uncanny inertia, in the existential or ontological incapacity to act as the girlfriend for her girlfriend, to do more than behold the violence done to her. Her dreamlike paralysis is a counterpart to that of Françoise as she views the CCTV sequence, whether real or reconstructed, of her daughter's abduction, and this freezing in the face of horror is connected to the more general condition of inertia that possesses both the mother and her putative child.

In the scene that follows the attack in the park, when Toni is on the run after a theft, Nina finds her – in fairy-tale style – by coming across the shoe that she has lost in her flight and restoring it to her. In its fairy-tale version, this would be Cinderella's shoe, transformed from the token of her abject existence in ashen inertia to the glass slipper that propels her into a new worldly life. When Nina also gives Toni the T-shirt, in place of her torn shirt, their friendship begins with gifts. Toni's lost and recovered shoe is the counterpart of the broken shoe of Françoise who will later claim to be Nina's long-lost mother. The scene in the park is cross-cut with a parallel establishing sequence which tracks Françoise walking down the corridors of some kind of clinic. Both soundtrack and image-track have a kind of impediment built into them in the irregular motions of this figure. It turns out that the heel of her shoe has been broken in a struggle over another girl that she had taken for her daughter. Thus, shoes are introduced in the film as vehicles of broken motion. And both the mother and Toni also have torn tops. Clothing thus acts as the material cladding of traumatic experience, as well as suggesting forms of at least potential reparation – the shoe returned to Toni by Nina, and the T-shirt freely given, an act then reciprocated by the gift of an earring. However, it becomes clear that Toni's friendship operates under the sign of an economy of the gift, demanding return and shadowed by the threat of parasitic exploitation and by the prospect of further loss. Shoes and other items of clothing represent both relational potential and the spectre of



non-relation and casting off by the other. They are seen as enabling the dynamics, the vitality of the body, and as symbolic dressing for the revitalization of experience; but they are also cast with the deadness, the inertia that may attach to life in the city. Thus, the T-shirt may serve as the contemporary commodity version of the Grimms' little death shroud. And the shoes are cast between the enabling form of inertia that Heidegger and Jameson see in the peasant shoes of van Gogh and the more spectral, ~~postmodern~~ condition put on display by Warhol.

While Nina does not herself lose or break a shoe, nor get her top torn, she embodies, or is cast in, the state of traumatic arrest that these experiences represent. When the girls steal new tops from H&M in the Potsdamer Platz arcades, we see Nina walking out of the shop in CCTV footage. This is a prelude to her ostensible mother grabbing hold of her shoulder as if she were a store detective reclaiming lost goods. In the monochrome condition of half-living that is the CCTV footage, we might see an image of that which Jameson finds in Warhol's picture of the shoes, exposing what he calls 'the deathly black-and-white substratum of the photographic negative which subtends them' (Jameson, 1991: 9). The logic of the capture by the ostensible mother, emerging out of this uncanny CCTV imagery, turns out to come from the spectral sequence of the abduction of her baby daughter when we see this later in the film. She appears to catch Nina as thief, as if breaking out of inertia and acting out the impossible act of catching the thief of her daughter.

If Nina is indeed the daughter who was stolen from in front of a supermarket, her past identity now only attested by infant photographs and this brief slow-motion film of removal from view, this casts her life in a kind of cinematic inertia. It is a life subject to violence, exploitation and separation, but in slow-motion form; a film in which, as in Nina's dream in the casting session, the viewing subject is powerless to intervene – caught in suspended animation. Nina thus becomes a ghost again in terms of her subjection to the phantom cinematographic function of CCTV footage, an embodiment of the hauntological condition of contemporary Berlin. If the uncertain and practically anonymous figure of Nina is to be the ghost that goes round in the city, embodying that condition, she does so not least through a particular kind of method acting. It is an acting-out of inertia, of virtual lack of movement, of the incapacity to intervene – personally or historically. On the few occasions that she does make moves of her own volition, the energy is short-lived and leads to capture or rejection and a reversion to her practically inert state. Her condition is that of an object of history, not its agential subject. And this is also

experienced, reflexively, by the viewer, unable to act upon her cinematic fate. Like the CCTV footage of the abduction of the child, Nina's film represents a kind of slow-motion loss that resists intervention, adoption or reparation.

If we look at the figure of Nina as she moves through the film, we see a figure that is indeed '*unheimlich lebendig*', uncannily close to the inertia of the clothing she wears or other dead matter. Most markedly, as she returns to the Tiergarten Park at the end of the film, having discarded the phantom-images, Nina (who bears the name of Harker's wife from one version of *Nosferatu*) moves in something like the manner of the film vampire as famously embodied by Max Schreck for Murnau's *Nosferatu*. As she consigns the wallet once more to the rubbish bin, along with its phantom images, the sound of the two empty containers hitting each other is emphatic, in keeping with the strikingly material (but also subtly preternatural) attention to ambient sound throughout the film. Here, it is the sound of projection into inertia, the ring of dead matter, as Nina disposes of her empty prospect of achieving ontological capital. Earlier, when she followed the same path alongside Toni after their encounter with Françoise and the theft of her wallet, Nina's arms moved slightly, as if in mimetic response to the energetic striding motions of the companion body at her side. At the end however, like *Nosferatu* or Harker's somnambulant wife and vampiric medium in Murnau's version, as she walks off alone, she does not move her arms. It is an undead form of corporeal inertia that you might not notice as you pass her on a path in the park or a city street, but once you notice, it also takes possession of you as viewer, mimicking your own sense of non-intervention in the fate of this vagrant ghost of Berlin.



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